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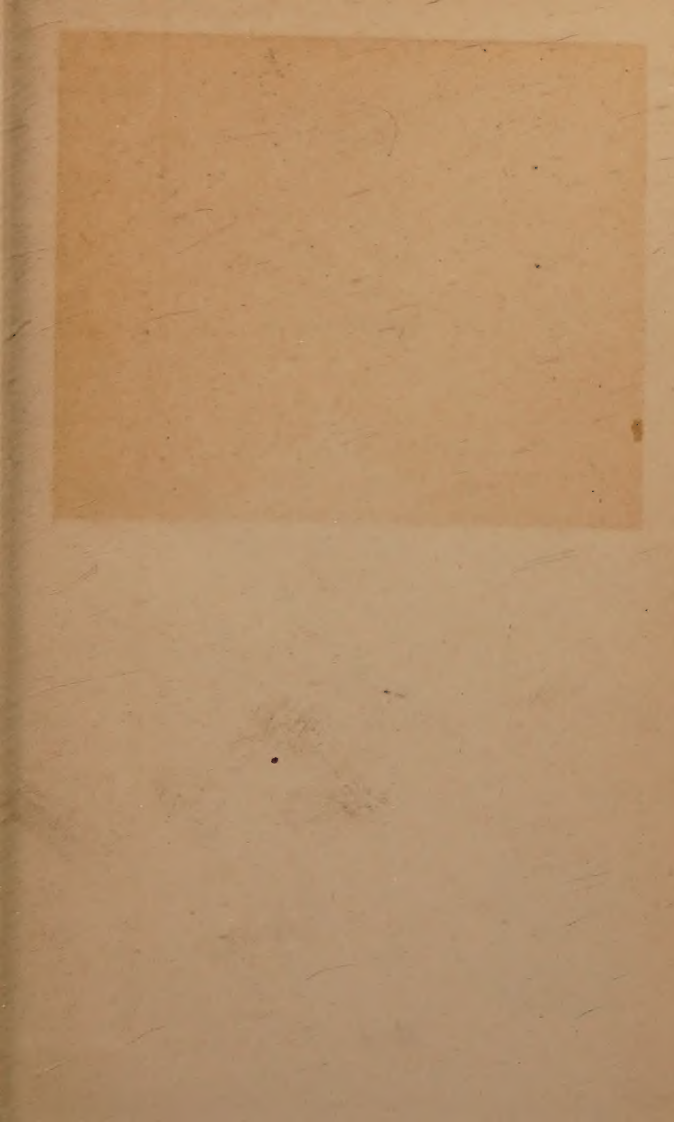
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JOHN BUNYAN

HIS LIFE
TIMES
AND WORK



JOHN BUNYAN

HIS LIFE

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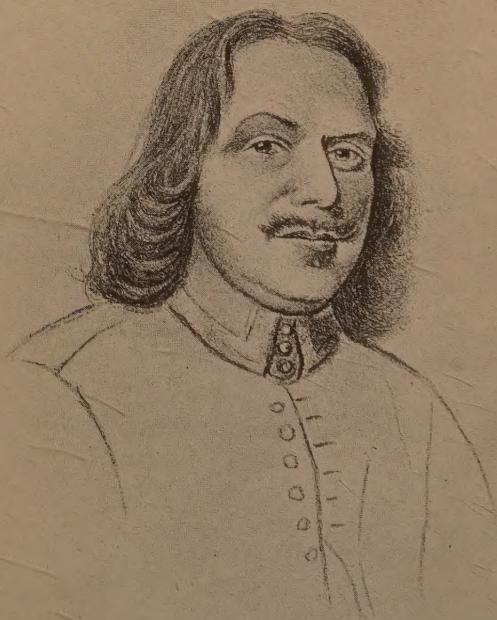
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John Bunyan

JOHN BUNYAN

HIS LIFE
TIMES
AND
WORK

By
JOHN BROWN, D.D.

*Minister of the Bunyan
Church, Bedford*

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

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PREFACE

The Life of Bunyan here presented in revised form was in the first instance published in 1885, and has now, therefore, been some seventeen years before the public. Both in Great Britain and America it was received with what was to the Author unexpected favour, and has been several times reprinted. In being now reissued in somewhat altered form, it has been brought up to date in some few particulars necessitated by the lapse of time, and with such additions as have come to light in recent years. The discovery in 1887 of the original warrant for Bunyan's arrest, which was found among the Chauncy MSS., seems to substantiate the theory put forth in 1885 that his second imprisonment, during which he wrote "The Pilgrim's Progress," took place in 1676, after the withdrawal of the Declaration of Indulgence. Another moot point, on which there were divers opinions, was as to the side Bunyan took as a soldier in the great Civil War. The finding in 1896 of the Muster-rolls of Newport Pagnell garrison among some unsorted papers in the Public Record Office, has settled once for all that his soldiering experiences came to him in the service of the Parliament,

PREFACE

when Newport was fortified by Parliamentary ordinance, as being "geometrically situate" between the contending shires east and west. From the time he was sixteen his name occurs in these muster-rolls for three years and a half, or until the time when Newport fortifications were dismantled, and the garrison disbanded. The only other point calling for notice is that the foreign versions of "The Pilgrim's Progress," which in 1885 stood at seventy-five, have now reached the number of ninety-five; two of the latest being a version for the Eskimo, and one for the people on the Congo River in Western Africa.

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Cover-design by H. GRANVILLE FELL

*Frontispiece—JOHN BUNYAN ; from Robert White's Pencil
Drawing (Cracherode Collection, British Museum)*

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I

EARLY CHURCH LIFE IN BEDFORDSHIRE

JOHN BUNYAN, born in the English Midlands, may be taken as in some sense a characteristic representative of the region that gave him birth. For the tract of country between the Trent and the Bedfordshire Ouse, which from its northern half gave the Pilgrim Fathers to New England, furnished from its fens and fields in the south a succession of men of his own sturdy independence of thought, and in strong sympathy with his own Puritan faith. In the development of even the most original genius, the environment counts for much ; it may help us, therefore, to a truer estimate of the man if we first briefly recall the spiritual antecedents of the county in which he was born and in which his life was spent.

When the Reformation broke in upon the old ecclesiastical system of England, Bedfordshire seems to have been more than usually receptive of the new ideas then rising over Europe. Not that the whole county, any more than other counties, was prepared to become Protestant at a stroke. Here, as

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elsewhere, many Englishmen, after their manner, were inclined to "stand in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths." Leading families, like the Mor-daunts of Turvey, remained firm in their allegiance to the ancient faith, and turned their houses into hiding-places for its bishops and priests during the hard days of Elizabeth and James. Not a few of the yeomen also held tenaciously to the old well-worn modes of religious thought, even while diligently attending the services of a Reformed Church. As late as 1579, or more than forty years after England had broken with the See of Rome, farmers like Robert Bonyon, of Wingfield, in the parish of Chalgrave, in the wills they made, still commended their souls not only to Almighty God, but also "to our blessed Ladie St. Mary and to all the holy company of heaven."

The tradespeople in the towns, however, as well as a majority of the gentry in the country-houses, were staunchly Protestant, as were also the two great noblemen, the natural chieftains of the county, the Earls of Kent and Bedford. The county, indeed, became a recognised asylum of religious liberty for many from across the sea. Refugees for conscience sake came from Alençon and Valenciennes, and settled at Cranfield in 1568, bringing with them their lace pillows, and establishing the lace trade of the district. And while many Protestants from the Netherlands, fleeing from Philip of Spain and the Duke of Alva, thus found a home in the villages of Bedfordshire, introducing names still to be recognised in the parish registers, collections were also made in the churches

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of the county for others still in their own land, and still suffering cruel hardships on account of their faith.

Both before the Reformation and for a century after we get what is probably the most realistic view possible to us now, of the ecclesiastical life of the people of England, from a source hitherto comparatively neglected, the "Act-Books" of the Archdeacons' Courts. From the middle of the fifteenth century certainly, and probably much earlier, with the exception of the brief reign of Edward VI., down to the year 1640, when the procedure known as *ex officio* was abolished, there was kept up a close surveillance of the lives of the people in each parish of each of the deaneries of which the archdeaconry was composed. These Courts, which were regularly held, took cognisance of every conceivable offence against morals as well as against ecclesiastical discipline. The form of procedure was either by *Inquisition*, when the judge was the accuser; by *Accusation*, when some other person made the charge; or by *Denunciation*, which was simple presentment. The most frequent penalty on conviction was a money fine, but in many cases the culprit had to do penance in a white sheet, or make public confession before a congregation of his neighbours. More serious offences were followed by excommunication, a penalty carrying with it social consequences of the gravest kind. For example, from the Act-Books of the Bedford Archdeaconry, we find that in 1617, William Worrall of Kempston was cited before the Court at Ampthill for buying and selling with Thomas Crawley, which he ought not to have

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done because Thomas Crawley was an excommunicate person. The same year John Glidall, fuller, of Cranfield, and Francis Crashop, were cited and fined, "for setting Richard Barrett, an excommunicate person, a work." Even love must be crossed and courtship forbidden till the Church was reconciled. In 1616 Roger Perriam, of St. Cuthbert's, Bedford, was cited, "for that there is a report that he doth frequent and keep company with Margaret Bennett, who standeth excommunicate." If an excommunicated person ventured to appear among his neighbours in the parish church, the minister was compelled to call public attention to his presence, and absolutely stop the service till the proscribed person had left the building. Indeed, the consequences which followed a man through life did not even cease with his death. Robert Baker, the parish clerk of Potton, was punished for burying the body of an excommunicate person in the churchyard; and some years later Anne Skevington of Turvey was herself excommunicated because that, in widowed grief, she had been present at the burial of her own husband, who for his nonconformity had died under the ban of the Church.

It lies outside the range of our present purpose, of course, but it would be interesting to show what curious light the records of the various Archdeacons' Courts throw on the morals and manners of our forefathers. A large proportion were cases of intemperance and impurity. Among the ecclesiastical offences were such as refusing to follow the cross in procession, hanging down the head at the elevation

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of the host, throwing the paxbread on the ground, separating the holy oil, washing hands in the baptismal font, singing the Litany derisively, refusing to pay dues and keep feast days, reading heretical and English books during the mass, not receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday, and not confessing at Easter. Among offences of a more miscellaneous character, we find one man bringing judgment upon himself for "marieing his wife in their parish church in her mask"; another "for being married to his wife under a bush"; and yet a third, "for that the day he was marryed he dyd blowe oute the lightes about the altar and wolde suffer no lightes to bourne." One unloving spirit was dealt with "for not treating his wife with affection"; another, yet more unloving, "for cheening his wife to a post and slandering his neighbours." People offended by "exercising the magic art," by consulting cunning women, by using private conventicles, and by "hiring foreigners to work at their art." It was an offence also not to "make two torches and keep the drynkynge in the parish, according to the laudable use and custom"; and a shoemaker was punished, for that he "kepeth his bedd upon the Sundaies and other holy days at time of mattens and mass, as it were a hownde that shuld kepe his kenell." One man came into trouble for "folding some sheep in the church during a snow storm"; and another, for "living in the church-porch, and suffering his wife to travail in childbirth there and to continue there her whole moneth." Women fell under the judgment of the Court for "coming to be churched without kercher, midwife or wyves"; or not "as other honest women, but

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comynge in her hatt, and a quarter about her neck"; or for "not coming in a vaile"; and one brisk housewife, striking out a bright idea on a rainy day, found to her cost that she had offended by "hanginge her linnen in the church to dry."

The law was administered with even-handed justice against the officials of the parish as well as against the common people. The clergy were cited for "not sprinkling holy water on the parishioners," for "letting divers die without howsill or shrifte throw his defeaute"; for "refusing to reply to the archdeacon in the Roman tongue"; for refusing to hear confessions, "because it grieves him to heare the confessions made." One rector went quite wrong by "taking upon himself to the scandal of his calling, to be lord of misrule at Christmas among certein yongelinges," and another by leaving some ecclesiastical ceremony to be present at the more exciting spectacle of an execution. The churchwardens incurred penalty by "suffering unrulie persons to ring and jingle the bells out of due season," by permitting a minstrel to play in church at a wedding, and because the white sheet used for penance was missing. The schoolmaster was fined for teaching children above sixteen years of age without licence, or for "being negligent in his place, his schollers not profitng under him." And, finally, that chartered libertine, the parish clerk, was dealt with summarily, and surely most righteously, "for that he singeth the psalmes in the church with such a jesticulous tone and altitonant voyce, viz., squeaking like a pigg, which doth not only interrupt the other voyces, but

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is altogether dissonant and disagreeing unto any musicall harmonie."*

It is curious to see the uses to which the churches were sometimes put in the days to which the Act-Books refer. Indeed we are almost startled to find Harman Sheppard, the curate of the parish, presented in 1612, for baiting a bear in the church at Woburn.† Some years later, also, the churchwardens of Knotting were cited because that on three successive Shrove Tuesdays they and their sons and Mr. Alvey, the rector of the parish, "permitted and were present at cockfightings in the chancell of the said church in or about the sacred place where the communion table stands, many persons being there assembled and wagers laid."‡ In still later years the rector of Carlton was presented because "immediately before service he did lead his horse in at the south doore into the chancell of Carlton church, where he sett him and there continued all the time of the said service and sermon." Patrons of benefices also, as well as clergy and churchwardens, sometimes dealt with the sacred edifice in remarkably free and easy fashion. An instance of this may be found in a village between Bedford and Northampton, of which in 1641, it was certified that the vicarage had been pulled down, the glebe lost, and the tithes detained, and that the lord of the manor, Jasper Hartnell, after dismantling the body of the church, selling the lead

* Hale's "Precedents and Proceedings in Criminal Causes," 1457-1640.

† "Lambeth MSS." Miscell., 952; 43.

‡ "State Papers, Dom.," Chas. I., 1637, vol. ccclxx. 90.

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and the bells, had turned the chancel into a kennel for his greyhounds, and the steeple into a dove-house for his pigeons.*

The country squires who could so rudely handle the churches would not be over nice in their treatment of the clergy. Jasper Fisher, the rector of Wilden, in his visitation sermon preached at Ampthill in 1635, complained that "the great men do send God's messengers upon their base errands, place them below their serving-men, esteem them below their parasites; nay, deride and abuse, persecute and destroy them for their message."† In the same strain speaks out that Shakespeare of the Puritans, as he was called, Thomas Adams, the vicar of Willington. In a Visitation Sermon preached at St. Paul's, in Bedford, in 1612, he asks, "Shall the Papists twit us that our *Our Father* hath taken from the Church what their *Paternoster* bestowed upon it? Were the goods of the Church for this intrusted to gentlemen and lords of the manors, that they should set them to sale and turn their benefits into their own purses? . . . We are well freed from the Bonners and butchers of Christ's lambs; but we have still fleecers enough—too many—that love to see learning follow Homer with a staff and a wallet. Every gentleman thinks the priest mean, but the priest's means hath made many a gentleman."‡

* "A Certificate from Northamptonshire," 4to. London, 1641.

† "The Priest's Duty and Dignity," by Jasper Fisher, Presbyter and Rector of Wilden in Bedfordshire. London, 1636.

‡ "Heaven and Earth Reconciled": A sermon preached

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The Puritan movement, like the Protestant before it, found a congenial home in Bedfordshire. Thomas Brightman, the vicar of Hawnes, a celebrated preacher and writer in his time, was one of several ministers who, in 1603, waited upon King James, at that time the guest of the Cromwells at Hinchinbrook, near Huntingdon. Speaking for the people from whom they came they "had some good conference with his Majesty and gave him a book of reasons." They pleaded against the use of the sign of the cross in baptism, against baptism by women, and against the use of the cap and surplice. They urged that there ought to be examination into the life of such persons as came to the communion, and that ministers ought not to be called priests. They petitioned against "longsomeness of service, and the abuse of church songes and music," against profanation of the Lord's Day, and against excommunication by such lay persons as the Archdeacon's commissary, or for trifles, and without the consent of pastors.*

It need not be repeated here how the Puritans got nothing from King James but this "good conference" at Hinchinbrook. But though disappointed in their hopes from him they held on their way, their opinions obtaining wider and firmer hold among the people. In 1633, the Bishop of Lincoln, reporting the condition of his diocese to Archbishop Laud observes, "Some in Bedfordshire use to wander from

at St. Paul's Church in Bedford, Oct. 3, 1612. Adams' Practical Works, 1862, I. 448, *et seq.*

* Petition to King James, Nov. 30, 1604. "Addl. MSS." 8978.

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their own parish churches to follow preachers affected by themselves, of which the officers are caused to take special care." The following year Laud himself reports to the King: "As for Lincoln, it being the greatest diocese in the kingdom, I have now reduced that under Metropolitcal Visitation, and visited it this preceding year. My visitors there found Bedfordshire most tainted of any part of the diocese, and in particular Mr. Bulkeley is sent to the High Commission for Nonconformity." * The first of the two visitors here referred to by the Archbishop was Dr. Farmery, chancellor of the diocese of Lincoln, who in July 1634, reported to him as follows: "That sort of people that run from their own parishes after affected preachers are the most troublesome part of the ecclesiastical inquisition in Buckingham and Bedfordshires, where they found great abettors in this their disorder. The new recorder of Bedford questioned at a sessions one of my apparitors for troubling, as he said, these godly men, and then delivered publicly that if men were thus troubled for going to hear a sermon when their minister at home did not preach, it would breed a scab in the kingdom." †

It was at this time that Archbishop Laud revived the long disused claim to Metropolitcal Visitation, sending his Vicar-General, Sir Nathaniel Brent, to report upon the ecclesiastical condition of the whole of the diocese of Lincoln. The month after Dr.

* Laud's Annual Reports of his Province to the King, 1633-1634. "Lambeth MSS." 943, p. 251.

† "State Papers, Dom.," Chas. I., 1634, July 14.

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Farmery's report had been received, Sir Nathaniel set forth, beginning at Lincoln and working his way southward. He unearthed strange doings and met with curious experiences. Ale-houses, hounds, and swine were kept in churchyards; copes and vestments had been embezzled; clandestine marriages were celebrated by the clergy; and both clergy and laity were much given to drunkenness. At Saxby, Lord Castleton's bailiff was found melting in the middle aisle of the church the lead he had stripped from the roof. At Brigstock, the Court had to deal with a clergyman who was charged with ensuring an audience to the end of his discourses by the simple expedient of locking the church door upon his congregation, keeping them there till it was quite dark. After this we come upon a different class of offenders. "At Huntingdon, divers ministers in that division were suspected for Puritanisme, but being questioned they professed absolute conformitie." Brent reached Bedford on the 26th of August, of which he reports: "Mr. Peter Bulkeley, rector of Odell, suspected for Puritanisme, was suspended for absence. He came to me to Aylesburie, where he confessed he never used the surplisse or the crosse in baptisme. He is to appear in the High Commission Court the first court day in November if he reform not before. Divers ministers in Bedford, especially Mr. Smith, are suspected for Nonconformitie." * From Ampthill, where he was on the 30th of August, he reports to Laud that "great complainte was made of the inconformitie of Mr. Shirley, the vicar of Hawnes,

* "State Papers, Dom.," Chas. I., 1634, vol. cclxxiv. 12.

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Mr. Holmes, the vicar of Whipsnade, and many others whom I questioned for inconformitie." Of Bow Brickhill, where he was on the 2nd of September, he says: "The people thereabouts, and indeed in all the south part of this diocese, are much addicted to leave their parish churches to go to hear affected preachers elsewhere. The country much complayneth of the Court at Leyton and those of the Court, of Puritanisme. Much complayning but no proving." With which words Sir Nathaniel took his leave.

When the Vicar-General was gone the officers of the local Ecclesiastical Courts still zealously carried out the policy of driving conscientious men into those ways of conformity so dear to the ecclesiastical mind. Among the MSS. in the House of Lords, calendared in recent years by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, there are numerous petitions, interesting to the local historian, which throw light on the course steadily pursued. In one petition, for example, John James of Olney complains that, though nothing had been proved against him, he had been compelled to pay a fine of £10 towards the building of St. Paul's, in London, the ordinary fees, and £16 to the Court. He had also, he says, to give a beaver to Sir John Lambe, Dean of Arches, "which cost your petitioner £4 more." His own minister being suspended, and no preaching going on in his own parish church, he went to hear a sermon elsewhere, and, though this sermon was preached in a parish church, and not in a conventicle, he was for this offence excommunicated. To obtain absolution from

EARLY CHURCH LIFE

this sentence cost him the ordinary fees and a fine of £24 more. John James has further sorrows to recount, "all which unjust proceedings have caused your petitioner to sell his inheritance, and to spend above £100, and tend greatly to his undoing." *

It would seem that many of the clergy fared no better than the laity. Another petition is from George Daniell, vicar of Steventon, and others, and complains that Walter Walker, the commissary of the Court at Bedford, "hath, by virtue of his office, tyrannized over the clergy of sett purpose to ingratiate himself with the Archbishop of Canterburie." In apportioning the tax laid upon the clergy for the King's expedition to Scotland, he had made excessive assessments, "threatening to suspend them, and to return their names if they did not comply." From Daniell he had demanded £5 instead of forty-six shillings, and from Thomas Wells, the rector of Carlton, £6. "This was greatly too much, and because he did not pay he cited Mr. Wells (though a hundred years olde) to Bedford Courte, being five miles from his living; and because he did not appear he suspended him, and called him an old owle, and would not dismiss him till he paid the £6." The petition, which was evidently a combined expression of grievances, goes on to describe how "the said commissarie did suspend the curate of Bromham for referring to the Government in his sermon," and did "exhibit articles against the rector of Stondon for reading divine service once without a surplice,

* "House of Lords MSS.," Feb. 9, 1640-1. Petition of John James.

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though it was proved by witnesses that at that time his surplice was at the washers"; how "he suspended the vicar of Cardington for once omitting to wear the surplice in the afternoon, though he had worn it in the morning"; and how he declared he would make Richard Kifford, the churchwarden of Cockayne Hatley, stand in three market towns barefooted and bareheaded, or pay a fine of £13 6s. 8d., for not presenting that the font was in decay.*

While the Court of High Commission in London and the Vicar-General in the country were thus stirring up feelings of resentment everywhere, a storm was gathering, before the fury of which some great heads were soon to bend low. In the November of 1641 there first assembled that Long Parliament which was to change so many things before its work was done. To this ever-memorable assembly Bedfordshire sent up three parliamentarians, Sir Beauchamp St. John of Bletsoe, Sir Oliver Luke, and his son, Sir Samuel of Cople Wood End, and the royalist Lord Wentworth of Todyngton. Within a month Lord Wentworth was raised to the Upper House in his own right, and Sir John Burgoyne, a parliamentarian, took his place. By this change the county in its representation came to be wholly on the side of Pym and Hampden in the impending struggle. The feeling of the time was electric, both as to hopes and fears.

On Tuesday, March 16, a petition was presented to Parliament by Sir John Burgoyne, who was

* "House of Lords MSS.," August 5, 1641. Petition of George Daniel, vicar of Steventon, &c.

EARLY CHURCH LIFE

accompanied by some two thousand persons, "the high sheriff, knights, esquires, gentlemen, ministers, freeholders, and others, inhabitants of the county of Bedford." They first express their gratitude to Parliament for what in so short a space had already been accomplished; for the pious care which had removed scandalous and superstitious innovations in religion; for the reassembling of Parliament, the removal of illegal taxes; for the abolition of the Star Chamber and the Court of High Commission, and for the taking away of bishops' votes in Parliament. With an obvious reference to Strafford and Laud, who were then in the Tower awaiting their trial, the petition asks for the displacement of all evil councillors and the punishment of all delinquents, and for the complete removal of all burdensome and scandalous ceremonies, and of all corrupt and scandalous ministers. They desire also that a learned, pious, and conscientious ministry may be provided for and maintained, especially in market towns and populous places; that the pious and painful divines who for unjust and frivolous causes had been deprived by the bishops and their officers, might receive ample reparation, and that there might be "a faithful magistracie as well as a painfull ministrie."*

Such was the tenor of the petition subscribed so numerously and presented to Parliament so impressively by the people of Bedfordshire. In the then prevailing temper of the House of Commons, both the petition and the demonstration were right

* Broadside, Printed by a true copy with the petitioners' approbation, at the charge of John Chambers, 1641.

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welcome at Westminster. It was ordered that Mr. Speaker, in the name of the House, shall take particular notice, and give the gentlemen of Bedfordshire thanks for their petition. It was no ordinary occasion, no common display of the feeling of the country, and even London was stirred at the sight. For these men from the Midlands rode four abreast through the city on their way to Westminster. "I myself," says Nehemiah Wallington, "did see above two thousand of these men come riding from Finsbury Fields, four in a rank, with their protestations in their hats."*

* "Historical Notices," II. 31.

II

ELSTOW AND THE BUNYANS OF ELSTOW

IF, as is not improbable, any considerable portion of the two thousand petitioners from Bedfordshire started from the county town, Bunyan, who was then a lad of twelve, may have stood and with wistful eyes watched this significant cavalcade as it passed through his native village, along the main street of which then lay the high road to London.

Elstow a little more than a mile to the south-west of Bedford, is a quaint, quietly nestling place, with an old-world look upon it, scarcely touched by the movements of our modern life. Fronting the roadside, with overhanging storeys and gabled dormers, are half-timbered cottages, some of which, judging from the oaken rafters and staircases of their interiors, have seen better days. The long building in the centre of the village, and now turned into cottages, with projecting upper chambers and central overhanging gateway, still retains much of the external appearance it presented as a hostelry for pilgrims in pre-Reformation times. Opposite to the gate of this

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hostelry is the opening to the village green, on the north side of which stands what we may call the Moot Hall of the parish, a picturesque building of timber and brick, which, with its oaken beams bearing traces of Perpendicular carving and its ruddy tiles touched here and there with many-tinted lichen, presents to the eye in the summer sunlight a pleasant combination of colour and form. This curious structure of fifteenth-century work, furnishing a somewhat fine example of the domestic architecture of the period, was probably originally erected to serve as the *hospitium* for travellers, and while not far from the road was yet within the *ballium* or outer court of Elstow Abbey.* At a later time, when the manorial rights passed from the Abbess to the Crown, there were held in the upper chamber those courts of the lord of the manor with View of Frankpledge, of which Bunyan's ancestors had some experience in the century before his birth. It was the scene, also, of village festivities, statute hirings, and all the public occasions of village life.

To the west of this building, on what was probably once the centre of a much larger green, rise the pedestal and broken stem of the ancient market cross round which were held those famous fairs of Elstow, possible suggestions of Vanity Fair, which had been a great village institution ever since the days of Henry II. It was on the green sward stretching this way and that round the cross that Bunyan played his Sunday games and heard those mysterious voices which changed for him the current of his life.

* "Architectural Notes," by M. J. C. Buckley, 1885.

THE BUNYANS OF ELSTOW

The elm-trees by the churchyard wall have, for safety's sake, been shorn of their upper branches, and the Church, of stern necessity, but with loving, heedful care, has been extensively restored; but the church tower, standing apart and, like the towers of Blyth, Shrewsbury, and Christchurch, of later date than the main building, remains the same as when Bunyan leaned against its doorway and delighted to ring the bells in the chamber overhead. The massive buttresses, the time-worn oaken door, "the roughly paved floor trodden with the hob-nailed boots of generations of ringers," the very bells themselves are unchanged by the two hundred years which have come and gone since he was there.

Passing through the church, or round it, on the south side we come upon a park-like meadow, with its handsome trees and colony of rooks, once part of the monastic enclosure; upon the delightful little chamber, with its groined roof and central pillar of Purbeck marble, sometimes, though erroneously, called the chapter house, sometimes the nuns' choir, but the actual use of which, standing as it does west of the church, it is not so easy to determine. We come also upon the fish-ponds of the abbey, now choked with weeds, and upon the old mansion of the Hillersdons, whose stately doorway, and ruined walls, and mullioned windows strong shoots of ivy have covered with a mantle of green.

Elstow, or Helenstow, the *stow* or stockaded place of St. Helen, a name cognate to such forms as Bridestow and Morwenstow, was so called because of the dedication of the old Saxon church to Helena, the

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mother of Constantine the Great. In 1078 there was founded in the place, by Judith, the niece of the Conqueror, a Benedictine nunnery, which remained the central feature of Elstow life till the surrender of the monasteries at the Reformation. In 1553 a grant was made by the Crown to Sir Humphrey Radcliffe, of "the whole demesne and site of the late Monastery or Abbey of Elenstowe, in our County of Bedford, dissolved." And while the abbey with its surroundings was thus handed over to the grantee, the church was dismantled, the materials being probably used in the construction of the mansion-house hard by; the nave was shortened by two bays; the central tower beyond, and the transepts, chancel, and Lady Chapel were taken down; a beautiful Norman doorway was removed from the east end, to form the present north-west entrance; and the church tower now standing by itself was constructed to hold the bells, which had been removed from the central tower.

Sir Humphrey Radcliffe died in 1566, his widow surviving him at Elstow till 1594. In 1616 his son, Sir Edward, sold the Elstow estate to Sir Thomas Hillersdon, who, in the days of James I., built at least a part of the house now in ruins to the south-west of the church. The Hillersdon arms are to be seen over the very graceful porch, which is in the best style of the English Renaissance. Of this part of the building Mr. Buckley says:—"The harmony of its proportions and the grace of its details show this little edifice to have been the work of a master hand; in the masques and arabesques which decorate the

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intrados of the arch, as well as the panels in the pediments of the pilasters, are traces of Italian taste ; and from the general style of the work there seems every reason to believe that Inigo Jones planned and added this elegant porch to the old manor-house." Standing back a little way from the high road, its carriage-drive leading up to this finely sculptured entrance, the manor-house was at its best in Bunyan's Elstow days, and may have suggested to him the conception of that "very stately palace the name of which was Beautiful, which stood just by the highway side."

Turning now from the surroundings of Bunyan's native village to his family antecedents, we find that his ancestors were in Bedfordshire as early at least as 1199. From the fact that in 1219 the form of the name was Buignon, really an old French word equivalent to the modern *beignet*, it is more than probable that the Bunyans sprang from those Northmen who came to us through Normandy. At all events, the name was found on the other side of the Channel as well as on this, for in the time of Henry VIII. the authorities of Dieppe complained to the deputy of Calais that the Flemings had taken prisoners Jehan Bunon and Collin Allais.*

The earliest settlement of the Bunyans in Bedfordshire seems to have been at Pulloxhill, a village about nine miles from Elstow. When Norman nobles quartered themselves upon English lands they gathered round them retainers and domestics from across the sea. In this way probably the Bunyans came to be the feudal tenants of Nigel de Albini, the

* "Letters and Papers," Henry VIII., vol. iii., part 3, 1521.

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ancestor of the Earls of Arundel, whose son Henry established himself at Cainhoe Castle, and to whom Pulloxhill and eleven other neighbouring manors, belonged. In the Dunstable Chronicle we find the following record made by prior Richard de Morin in 1219: "In this year the aforesaid Justiciaries were at Bedford in presence of whom we obtained our return against Henry Bunyun for the land of John Travayle."* The Assize Roll of Bedfordshire for that year has preserved no record of this case, which may, however, have been on a missing membrane, but it shows that at the same Assize there were presentments made by commissioners of Henry Buignon by Simon son of Robert, and of John Buignon by Roger son of Walter.† In the Dunstable Chronicle‡ there are three other references by a subsequent prior, showing the relation of the family to Almaric St. Amand, the descendant of de Albini. They are as follows: "In the same year (1257), after the feast of St. Martin, we bought of Almaric St. Amand land which he had of John Boynun at Pollokeshille for forty-three marks and a half." Three pages later the entry is repeated, with the addition that the purchase made from St. Amand was land which he had "of the gift of John Boinun." It would appear that this John Boynun or Boinun was a freeman of St. Amand's, for on the death of the latter in 1286 the then prior of Dunstable tells us that scutage was paid to

* "Annales Monastici," edited by H. R. Luard, M.A., 1866, vol. iii. 54.

† Assize Rolls, Bedfordshire, 3 Henry III.

• ‡ "Annales Monastici," vol. iii. pp. 43, 204, 207.

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St. Amand's executors, and that "for the fee of John Boynun who made service for half a knight," a certain payment was made. This is some clue to his social position, for the prior had previously said that a knight's service was for five hides of land, so that Boynun held some two hundred and twenty acres on condition of furnishing military service to the extent of half a knight. This scutage fee paid on the death of his chief amounted to about £80 of present value.

From Pulloxhill the family of the Bunyans moved, one part of them to the south, in the direction of Chalgrave and Dunstable, the other branch to the north in the direction of Elstow. Of those who moved to the south there sprang one concerning whom there remains this dark and evil record in the Assize Roll of 1219: "In the half-hundred of Stanburgh. A certain clerk unknown was found killed in the fields of Toternhoe. William Turviter was the first person who found him, but he is not suspected; Ralph Buington of Dunstable, who was hanged for that death, acknowledged that he killed him, and on account of that death was arrested. Let enquiry be made at Dunstable for his chattels. The Englishry was not presented, therefore the crime was murder."* The meaning of this being, of course, that the Normans, living in the midst of the hostile population they had conquered, for their own defence enacted and kept in force till 1340, the law known as the Presentment of Englishry, in accordance with which an unknown man found slain was presumed to

* Assize Rolls, Bedfordshire, 3 Henry III., memb. 14.

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be a Norman, unless the hundred in which he was found could prove that he was an Englishman. If they could not a fine was levied on the hundred, and in this case towards the payment of the fine for the murder of this unknown priest the murderer's own chattels were to be inquired for.

Leaving this Ralph Buington, who came to an end so tragic in the south of the county, we turn now to that portion of the Bunyan family with whom we are more immediately concerned, and who, at least twenty years earlier, had moved in the direction of Elstow. The earliest reference we have to the name relates to these. In 1199 William Buniun pleaded against the abbess of Elstow in the Court of King's Bench that William of Wilsamstede had sued him in respect of half a virgate of land which he held in that place.* The meaning of the plea probably being that this was a friendly suit to determine the title to the land—to settle, in fact, whether Buniun was the tenant of the abbess or of the aforesaid William. The point of interest for us in the case, of course, is that as early as 1199 there was a Buniun holding land at Wilstead, only a mile away from Elstow.

The next document is even more interesting still, inasmuch as it shows that not only had the Bunyans come to Wilstead, but that a William Boynon, probably a descendant of the William of 1199, was living in 1327 on the very spot in the fields by Harrowden and Elstow, on which, three hundred years later, John Bunyan was born. This document, again, relates to an agreement made at Westminster, on the morrow

* Rot. Cur. Reg., 1 John (20th June, 1199), i. 417.

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of All Souls, in which Simon, son of Robert atte Felde, of Elnestowe, and William de Maydenbury Peleter were the plaintiffs, and Wm. Boynon, of Harewedon, and Matilda his wife were deforciantes of a messuage and an acre of land with the appurtenances in Elnestowe. A certain covenant was made; "and for this acknowledgment, warranty, fine, and agreement the said Simon and William gave to the aforesaid William Boynon and Matilda one hundred shillings of silver." *

It is a long interval between this document of 1327 and the year 1542, yet between these two dates no references to the Bunyan family of any kind have reached us. There has been preserved in the Augmentation Office the Court Roll of the manor of Elstow, embracing the years between 1542 and 1550, which presents several points of interest. The earlier records of the manor appear to have been lost with the rest of the documents in the possession of the Abbess of Elstow. During these years, which were those between the surrender of the monastery and the grant to Sir Humphrey Radcliffe, the manor was vested in the Crown, and there was held each spring and autumn a Court of the Manor, with View of Frankpledge. That is to say, at these Courts the socmen, or juratores, or homagers, as they were variously termed, the men who held lands under the manor did fealty for those lands, or paid fines on renewal or relief in socage, which was a kind of succession duty to the lord of the manor. Besides transacting such business as this, these Courts also exercised jurisdiction over

* Fines, Bedford, 20 Edward II. (1327), No. 2.

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the general affairs of the village, marking delinquencies, settling disputes, redressing grievances, and punishing offenders. The first Court of which the Roll makes mention was held on the 13th of April, 1542, and among the homagers present was Thomas Bonyon. After the record of other business transacted, there is the following entry :—

“At this Court it is witnessed by the homage that William Bonyon who held freely of the lord the King as of his manor of Elnestow a messuage and a pightell with the appurtenances in Elnestow. And nine acres of land particularly and severally lying in the fields of Elnestow by fealty, suit of court, and rent by the year of three shillings and one halfpenny from which last Court he died. And that Thomas Bonyon is the son and next heir of the aforesaid William Bonyon and is of the age of forty years and more, whereupon there falls to the lord the king of relief in socage—iijs 0½^d—which said Thomas Bonyon acknowledges that he holds the aforesaid messuage, pightell, and nine acres of land by the rent and service aforesaid. And that the aforesaid messuage and pightell are situate together and lie in Elnestow aforesaid between the messuage and close of Thomas Whytebred on the west part and the highway there on the east part.”

In the record of the Court held six years later, on 30th of April, 1548, there is the following entry, which is interesting as describing yet more accurately the identical spot, with its surroundings, on which, eighty years afterwards, Bunyan was born. It relates to the sale of three roods of the land which had

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belonged to the Bonyons, and the subsequent readjustment of the small quit rent payable to the lord of the manor:—

“Elnestow—View of Frankpledge with Court, 30th April, 38 Henry VIII. Fealty. To this court came Robert Corteys and acknowledged that he held freely of the said lord the king as of the manor aforesaid by fealty suit of court and rent of a penny and a halfpenny by the year three roods of arable land together lying in the east field of Elnestow upon the furlong called Pesselynton, between the land of John Gascoign, knight, on either side, and abuts on the north head upon Cardyngton broke and the south head upon the close called Bonyon’s End, which he had of the gift of Thomas Bonyon of Elnestowe, in the county of Bedford, labourer, as by the charter of the said Thomas bearing date the 18th day of the month of April in the 37th year of the said lord the king is fully clear, which said three roods were late parcel of a messuage and certain lands late of William Bonyon, father of the aforesaid Thomas Bonyon, and which said messuage and lands were charged to the said lord the king with one whole yearly rent of three shillings and fourpence. And the aforesaid three roods were apportioned at the aforesaid rent of a penny and a halfpenny by the year. And the aforesaid Thomas Bonyon is discharged of the same yearly rent of a penny and a halfpenny.” *

Thomas Bonyon was evidently going down in the world, and selling piece by piece his ancestral land.

* Exchequer Court of Augmentations, Court Rolls, portfolio xi., No. 22.

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For a year later came John Lynwood to the Court, acknowledging "that he held freely of the lord the king as of his manor there by fealty, suit of Court and rent of 2d. by the year, three acres and a rood of land particularly and severally lying in Harodon Sharpe-fold, in the parish of Cardyngton, which were formerly of Thomas Bonyon."

There were sixteen Courts of the manor of Elstow of which we have knowledge at the end of the reign of Henry VIII. and the beginning of that of Edward VI., and at all of them but one Thomas Bonyon appears among the dozen or so of juratores or homagers. Besides the sale, first of three roods and then of three acres and a rood of his land, there are signs that either he or his wife was in trouble at twelve out of the sixteen of these Courts. She is described in one place as "a common brewer of beer"; and in another as "a common baker of human bread"—human bread, we may presume, as distinguished from horse-bread; and eleven times over she was fined for breaking the assize of beer and bread—that is, for asking higher prices than those fixed by the Court of the manor. In the days of the Abbess she would have been sent to the cucking-stool for her repeated offences; but in the more lenient days on which she had fallen, she was simply amerced seven times at a penny and four times at twopence. In 1547 Thomas Bonyon himself and not his wife appeared before the Court as the offending brewer of beer, and was fined a penny. This, however, did not prevent his being chosen, in the autumn of the same year, along with Thomas Crowley, as parish constable, to which office

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he was duly sworn. Seven years later this ancestor of Bunyan, who seems to have been the keeper of a small roadside inn on the way to Medbury, was called before a much more august tribunal than that of the Court of the manor. In 1554, for some reason not given, he was summoned to appear before the Privy Council at Westminster. In the register of the Council there is a minute under date November 18, ordering "certain persons to attende upon the lorde Cobham at Rochester at the commyng in of the lorde Cardynall Pole, and from thence to Gravesend." Two days later another meeting of Council was held, when letters of appearance were addressed from their lordships to "baylief Williams, George Walton, gent., Bunyon, victualler, all of Ellstowe, in the Countie of Bedford," with seven other persons from the same parish, whose names were also given.* The mention of Cardinal Pole at this time is suggestive of the returning tide of Papal power in England. Was it for his Protestantism that Bunyon the victualler was summoned before the Privy Council of Queen Mary?

The Court Roll of the manor, interesting as it is in itself, is interesting also as furnishing incidental confirmation of the tradition among the people of Elstow as to the exact spot which was Bunyan's birthplace. There is a cottage shown in the village street as Bunyan's cottage, in which there is no doubt he lived for some time after his marriage; but the ancients of the place have always maintained that he was born in the eastern fields of the parish, and close to the hamlet of Harrowden. That

* Privy Council Register, 1553-1558, p. 189.

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extremity of the parish they called Bunyan's End—the name by which, as we have seen, it was known eighty years before Bunyan was born, and probably for centuries earlier. A pathway in the fields was spoken of as Bunyan's Walk; two fields on the slope beyond the southern stream still go by the name of "Bunyan's" and "farther Bunyan's" among the labourers on the farm; and finally, with the persistence of English village names, the piece of land between the two streams is still known as "the furlong called Pesselynton," as the Roll shows it was in the days of Henry VIII. When, in addition, we remember that a small farmer named John Rogers, who died in the village of Elstow in 1859, at the advanced age of ninety-two, and whose great-grandfather, living in the next house to the Bunyans, was John Bunyan's playfellow, frequently pointed out to his neighbours as the dreamer's birthplace the piece of land south of "Cardyngton broke" described by the Roll of the manor as Bonyon's End, we feel at once that State document and popular tradition combine to give us certainty as to the site.

After the Court Roll of 1550, and the Privy Council minute of 1554, we know nothing more of the Bunyans till 1603, when the Transcript Registers commence. The Parish Register of Elstow for the period earlier than 1641 has long been lost, but fortunately the returns sent year by year to the Registry in accordance with the canon of 1603, come to our assistance. Almost the first entry we find in the first return from Elstow is that of the baptism of John Bunyan's father, which is recorded thus:—

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1602-3: "Thomas the Sonne of Thomas Bunyon the xxiiijth daye of ffebr."

The mother of the child then baptized may have died in giving him birth, for towards the end of the same year Thomas Bunyon, the father, was again married at Elstow Church to Elizabeth Leigh. This Thomas, the elder, the grandfather of John, lived on till 1641, and describes himself in his will as a "pettie chapman," or small village trader. Like his grandson after him he appears not to have been quite so submissive to the authorities of the time as they could have desired. Two, and only two time-worn Act-Books of the Archdeaconry of Bedford relating to the times of James I. have been preserved. From one of these we find that at the Court held at Ampthill, October 21, 1617, two of the Elstow parishioners were presented by the churchwardens before the commissary. One of these was Thomas Cranfield, who was charged with "refusing to sit in a seat of the church where the churchwardens placed him"; the other was Thomas Bonion, who was presented for telling the churchwardens they were "forsworne men." Feeling was evidently running high just then, and indeed that year matters ecclesiastical were altogether in a bad way in Elstow, for three months later the vicar of the parish himself, Henry Bird, was presented at the same court for neglecting his cure; "on Sondag was a fortnight there was noe service," and on another occasion "Rose Ravens of Elstowe was cited for churching herself, the minister being at home."

Seven other children were born to the elder

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Thomas Bunion after the birth of Bunyan's father, four of whom died in infancy. He himself surviving till 1641, made his will on November 25 in that year, in which he describes himself as, "I Thomas Bonyon of the parish of Elstowe in the countie of Bedford, Pettie Chapman, being sicke of bodie but of perfect remembrance, thanks be given to Almighty God, doe make and ordayne this my last Will and Testament in manner and forme following That is to say First I give and bequeath my soule into the handes of Almighty God my Creator assuringe myselfe by the death and passion of my blessed Saviour Jesus Christ to receive pardon and remission for all my sinnes and that my soul shall be received into his heavenly kingdome ther to rest with him for ever And my bodie to the earth whereof it is made to be buried in Christian buriall at the discreson of my executrix hereafter named And for the worldly goods that God hath blessed me withall I doe dispose of as followeth Item I give and bequeath to Anne Bonyon my wife [his third wife] after my decease the Cottage or Tenement wherein I doe now dwell with the appurtenances during the tearme of her naturall life And after the decease of Anne Bonyon my said wife I give and bequeath the said Cottage or Tenement with the appurtenances unto my Two Sonnes Thomas Bonyon and Edward Bonyon and their Heires for ever to be equally parted and devided between them after the decease of my said wiffe." He further leaves the sum of £5 to his daughter, Elizabeth Watson, the wife of Thomas Watson, and to his grandchildren, of whom, of course

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John Bunyan was one, "sixe pence a peece toe bee paied them when they accomplish their severale ages of one and twentie yeares." Everything else he leaves to Anne Bonyon, his loveing wife, whom he makes whole and sole executrix, concluding thus : "I doe further make and ordayne Thomas Carter of Kempston in the said countie of Bedford, gentleman, my loveinge and Kind Friend, overseer of this my last Will and Testament And do give him Twelve pence in remembrance for his paines to be taken in seeinge this my last Will and Testament duly and truly executed."* The document was signed with a cross in the presence of Henry Latham and Walter Cooper, and was proved before Walter Walker on December 14, 1641.

Thomas Bonyon, the son of this man and the father of John, was first married to Anne Pinney, at Elstow Church, on January 10, 1623, when he was in his twentieth year. In 1627 Anne died, and so far as the register shows, died childless. The same year he came again to Elstow Church to be married, this time to the wife who was to be the mother of his illustrious son. As we did not, till the recent search among the Transcript Registers, know the maiden name of the mother of the Dreamer, it may be well to give the entry in full, which is as follows :—

1627. "Thomas Bonnionn, Junr., and Margaret Bentley were married the three and twentieth of May."

We who, in the course of modern thought, have come to attach so much importance to hereditary

* Bedfordshire Wills, 1641. No. 202.

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transmission, would have been glad to know more than we do of the character and personality of the parents of one who occupies so prominent a place in English literature, and who was so unmistakably a child of genius. Unfortunately, their son, while telling so much about his own inward experiences, tells us but little concerning his father and mother. Even the little he does tell seems as if it ought to be qualified. When we remember that the wills of his father and grandfather, and of his maternal grandmother have been preserved in the Registry of the District Court of Probate from a time when the poorest of the poor never made any wills at all, and that the house in which he was born had been the property of his ancestors from time immemorial, it would seem as if Bunyan in his humility had depreciated the social position of his family more than he had need. He says, "For my descent then, it was, as is well known by many, of a low and inconsiderable generation, my father's house being of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all the families in the land." That these expressions ought not to carry the full force they carry to-day is shown by the fact he proceeds to state. "But yet, notwithstanding the meanness and inconsiderableness of my parents, it pleased God to put it into their hearts to put me to school to learn both to read and write, the which I also attained according to the rate of other poor men's children." Still, when all fair deductions are made, Bunyan's parents were poor enough no doubt, and the struggle of life with them keen enough. It need scarcely be said, however, that he

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was not the man to give forth unmanly wailings about the lowliness of his position or the hardships of his lot. In his own hearty religious fashion he sums up the question by saying: "Though I have not here, as others, to boast of noble blood or of a high-born state according to the flesh, all things considered I magnify the heavenly Majesty for that by this door he brought me into this world, to partake of the grace and life that is in Christ by the Gospel."

Thomas Bunyan, his father, usually spoken of as a tinker, described himself in his will as a "braseyer."* Working at his forge by the cottage in the fields, repairing the tools and utensils of his neighbours at Elstow or Harrowden, or wandering for the purposes of his trade from one lonely farmhouse to another, he would be neither better nor worse than the rest of the craftsmen of the hammer and the forge.

Margaret Bunyan, the tinker's wife, and the Dreamer's mother, like her husband, was a native of Elstow, being born there in the same year in which he was born, as the following entry from the Transcript Register shows:—

1603. "Margarett Bentley, daughter of Wm. Bentley, was C. [christened] the xiiij^o of November."

Though her parents, William Bentley and Mary Goodwin were married, in 1601, at St. Paul's Church, in Bedford, we may infer that since Mary Bentley, her grandmother, died in Elstow, as a widow, in 1613, the Bentleys, like the Bunyans, had been long resi-

* In the books of the Norwich Freemen the "brasyers" included pewterers, plomers, and belyaters, or bell-founders. —Rye's "History of Norfolk." 1885.

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dent in the parish. Their names do not occur in the Court Roll of Elstow between 1542 and 1550, but are found in the earliest Transcript Register. In any case, as they were both born in Elstow in the same year, Margaret Bentley had known Thomas Bunyan all her life, when in 1627, at the age of twenty-four, she was married to him in Elstow Church, her sister Rose being also married to his brother Edward the following year. Her mother died as a widow in 1632, though in what year her father died the register omits to state. Her mother's will, drawn up in the neat, scholarly handwriting of John Kellie, the vicar of Elstow, giving as it does some idea of the social condition of John Bunyan's mother before her marriage, as well as a Dutch-like picture of an Elstow cottage interior of two hundred and fifty years ago, may in part at least be worth recording.

It was on June 27, 1632, that "Mary Bentley, of Elnestoe in the countie of Bedford, widow," after bequeathing her soul to Almighty God her Maker in whom she hopes to be saved through Jesus Christ her Saviour, and her body to be buried in the churchyard at Elnestoe, goes on to say: "Item I give and bequeath to John Bentley my sonne one brasse pott, one little table and all the painted cloaths about the house and the standing Bed in the loft. Item I give to my daughter Margaret the joined stoole in the chamber and my little case. Item I give to my daughter Rosse the Joined forme in the chamber and a Hogshead and the dumbe flake. Item I give to my daughter Elizabeth the lesser kettle and the biggest plater, a flaxen sheet and a flaxen pillowbere,

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a trumell bed and a coffer in the chamber and the table sheet. Item I give to my daughter Anie my best hatt, my best cuffe, my gowne, my best petticoate, the presse in the chamber, the best boulster and blankett, the coffe above, the skillet and a pewter platter, and the other trummle bed, a harder sheet and a pillowbere." All else she gives and bequeaths to her daughter Mary, whom she makes sole executrix, and whom she charges to see her "honestly buried" and her "buriall discharged." The will was attested by John Kellie, the vicar of Elstow, and Margerie Jaques, a widow, and was proved in the October following. The cottage equipments, and the way they are described, seem to indicate that Margaret Bunyan came not of the very squalid poor, but of people who, though humble in station, were yet decent and worthy in their ways, and took an honourable pride in the simple belongings of their village home.

Scanty as are the references which Bunyan makes to his father, those to his mother are scantier still. This may arise partly from the fact that she died before he reached the age of sixteen, and his remembrance of her may have been dim and distant when two and twenty years later he wrote that story of his life which we find in the "Grace Abounding." It is of course useless to speculate much where we know so little, yet we are tempted to think that the mother of a child so much above the common kind must herself have been a woman of more than common power. We should not be surprised to be told that she was one of those strongly-marked person-

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alities sometimes met with in English village life—a woman of racy, ready wit, and of picturesque power of expression, who, Mrs. Poyser-like, had a very distinct individuality of her own, and the capacity of making a very distinct impression upon those around her. Unfortunately to us she is little more than a name, and we recall her for a moment from the nameless crowd and from the midst of her “homely joys and destiny obscure” because of the one great event of her life, the birth of her distinguished son, her first-born. The record of that event quietly takes its place in the list of the nineteen christenings of that year, at Elstow Church, in the following form :

1628. “John the sonne of Thomas Bonnionn, Junr. the 30th of Novemb.”

The return is signed by John Kellie, minister, and Anthony Manley and William Allerson, churchwardens. The entry is commonplace enough, and made in the same routine fashion as were hundreds more, yet as we read, the record becomes more than usually suggestive of the simple beginnings of a great, strong life. Once again we seem to see the wondrous babe carried on that last of the chill days of the November of 1628 to Elstow Church. Rude was the little cradle out of which he was lifted, and commonplace the cottage, with its grimy forge, out of which he was carried. Looking at all his unpromising surroundings, there comes into our minds a rustic story told about the father of this child by quaint old Thomas Archer, the rector of Houghton Conquest, parish next neighbour to Elstow itself. The

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delightful old man kept a sort of *chronicon mirabile* of the little rural world in which, king's chaplain as he was, his tranquil days were spent, and in his record, as a curiosity of natural history, he sets down this: "Memorandum.—That in Anno 1625 one Bonion of Elsto clyminge of Rookes neasts in the Bery wood ffound 3 Rookes in a nest, all white as milke and not a blacke fether on them."

Vividly the whole scene comes back to us. This "Bonion of Elsto," the father of the Dreamer, wandering in vacant mood in the Ellensbury Wood, looks and wonders at the three milk-white birds in the black rook's nest. And as we watch him, the surprise on his face becomes symbol and presage of a wider world's wonder than his, the wonder with which men find in the rude nest of his own tinker's cottage a child all lustrous with the gifts of genius, a life memorable in the literature of the great world stretching far away beyond Elstow Green, and memorable, too, in the spiritual history and experience of many souls in many nations through the centuries to come.

III

THE CIVIL WARS

THE cottage at Bunyan's End in which Bunyan was born has long since disappeared. Portions of it were still remaining at the close of last century, but the site was shortly after ploughed up, and, with the nine acres of land once belonging to it, was added to the neighbouring farm. It stood at the foot of a gently sloping hill, and between two streams which, after enclosing "the furlong called Pesselynton," met a little farther on in the hamlet of Harrowden. One of these streams flowed close past the cottage, and after heavy rains turned the field behind, as the land still shows, into a veritable Slough of Despond, into which whosoever wandered stuck fast in miry perplexity.

Thomas Bunyan's family, living only a few yards within the Elstow parish boundary, were almost as near to Bedford town as to Elstow Church, the spire of St. Paul's seen through the elm-trees from the top of the grassy slope to the south, being only about a mile away. A bridle-road from Wilstead through Medbury, passing near the front of the

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cottage, took the line of the willow-trees still to be seen in the hedgerow and joining the main road at the leper house of St. Leonard, went into the town by the ancient hospital of St. John.

Poor as his parents were, Bunyan says, "it pleased God to put it into their hearts to put me to school to learn both to read and write." The scholarship thus acquired was of course of the slenderest, "according to the rate of other poor men's children," and the little he learned was soon lost, "even almost utterly." If he went to Elstow, school inspectors had not yet risen above the village horizon, and even the endowed foundations in the neighbourhood had fallen upon evil days. The Free School of Sir Francis Clarke, in the neighbouring parish of Houghton Conquest, had its master, Christopher Hills, displaced by the master and fellows of Sidney Sussex College, in 1645, "for his wilful neglect and forsaking of the schools contrary to our trust reposed in him." * And the then modest foundation of Sir William Harper at Bedford in those days fared no better. A petition referring to the time when Bunyan was between nine and twelve years of age complains that William Varney, the schoolmaster, had not only charged fees which he had no right to do, but had also "grossly neglected the school by frequent absence from it, by night-walking and mis-spending his time in taverns and ale-houses, and is also very cruel when present to the boys." †

In any case, school-days were few, if not evil, for

* Harl. MSS., 4115, 79.

† House of Lords MSS.

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the tinker's son. The education he received was mainly that given in the great school of human life where so many other sturdy natures have received such effective training. "I never went to school to Aristotle or Plato," says he, "but was brought up at my father's house in a very mean condition, among a company of poor countrymen." In the cottage by the stream bread-eaters must as soon as possible become bread-winners, and Bunyan passed quickly enough from the bench of his master to the forge of his father, necessity, if not choice, indicating that he must be a "braseyer" too.

The growing lad had been at work some time when there came to him, in his sixteenth year, the first great sorrow of his life; for in the June days of 1644 his mother sickened and died, and within another month his sister Margaret also, the playmate of his childhood, was carried across the fields to the same quiet grave in Elstow Churchyard. Nor was this all. Before yet another month had gone by over this twice-opened grave, his father had brought home another wife to take the vacant place. This indignity to his mother's memory, which the lad was old enough to understand and affectionate enough keenly to resent, must have estranged him from his father and his home. The removal of the gentler influence of mother and sister at the formative period of life, and the revulsion of feeling created by the indecent haste with which his father married again, may have had not a little to do with those wild and wilful ways of the next few years, which he lived to describe so vividly and repent so bitterly.

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It was probably about six or eight months after his mother's death that Bunyan entered the Army, and had those experiences of a soldier's life to which he makes brief reference in the "Grace Abounding." Earlier it could not have been, for it was not till November 1644 that he had reached the then Army regulation age of sixteen. The side on which Bunyan was arrayed in the great civil conflict of the seventeenth century, Parliamentary or Royalist, was long matter of dispute. Lord Macaulay held that "he enlisted in the Parliamentary army, and served during the decisive campaign of 1645." On the other hand, Mr. Froude says that "probability is on the side of his having been with the Royalists," giving as the reason for this opinion that his father was of "the national religion," and that John Gifford, the minister at Bedford, had been a Royalist.* A recent discovery, however, has finally settled as a fact that Bunyan served on the Parliamentary side. In 1896 Mr. Ernest G. Atkinson, of the Public Record Office, found the Muster Rolls of the Newport Pagnell garrison among some unsorted Commonwealth papers. They are contained in a paper volume of some three hundred leaves, the Musters being certified by Henry Whitbread as Muster-master. From these records we find that Bunyan served in the Parliamentary garrison in Newport Pagnell in two of the companies in Sir Samuel Luke's regiment. In the roll of Colonel Richard Cockayne's company, mustered November 30, 1644, amongst the privates, or "centinels," as they are called, is the name of "John Bunion." On

* "English Men of Letters." Bunyan, p. 12.

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March 22, 1645, his name drops out of Colonel Cockayne's company and is found in that of Major Boulton. There it remains until May 27, four days before the storming of Leicester by King Charles. Later on Mr. Atkinson found a folio sheet of paper giving a list of the officers and soldiers belonging to the company of Lieut.-Colonel Charles O'Hara, mustered at Newport Pagnell June 17, 1647, and among the names of the seventy-nine privates in that list is found that of "John Bunnion," so that in 1647 he is still found in the same garrison he had entered two and a half years before.

The military leader under whom he served was Sir Samuel Luke of Cople Wood End, who was a tower of strength for what he called "the good old cause." He was one of the Members for Bedford in the Long Parliament, scout-master to the Army, and governor of the garrison of Newport Pagnel. He is said to have been the original of Butler's "Hudibras" and the special object of his satire. If this be so, the picture there given of Sir Samuel will scarcely be accepted as a picture from the life by those who have gathered their impressions of this knight of Cople from his own Letter book during the three years he was governor of Newport. This consists of four MS. volumes* and contains letters to him from Cromwell, Fairfax, and other great leaders and officials of the Government, and from him to them and also to his father, Sir Oliver Luke, to his son and his son's tutor, to his neighbours in the county, to his brother officers

* Egerton MSS., 785, 786, 787. Ashburnham MSS. Stowe Collection, 229.

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and others. In all these he leaves the impression upon us of a man of shrewd observation, of unquestionable valour, of godly life, and, what we should not have gathered from Butler's caricature, of considerable breadth of humour and humanness. He is certainly far from conforming to the conventional idea of a narrow and ascetic Puritan. We find him writing to his son at Geneva, where he is travelling with his tutor, and while urging him to keep the fear of God before his eyes, he wishes him to "strive to perfect his Italian hand, to follow his mathematics, fencing, vaulting and exercise both of Picke and musket." Writing to Pelham Moore, one of the Secretaries of State, he is not too much concerned about war supplies to forget to ask, "If there bee any new wynes come over y^t are excellent good pray send mee down a Teirce or two half hogsheads upon y^e lees of best Claritt." The wine was sent, but not the war supplies, and Sir Samuel rallies "fforgetful Mr. Moore" upon the long time he is in sending him the needful "shovells, spades, mattockes, Iron Crowes, Drums, Cullors, and Halberds," and thinks he must be "a kinn or some greate acquaintance of that Sir Thomas Bayers who wore his Cloaths five yeare in his head before hee putt them to the making." He adds: "Your Claritt wine is starke naught both in the eye and mouth." Therefore Mr. Moore, who has just come away from the presence of Cromwell, whom he has left "well and merry," tells his friend. "Coming thence by Boate I saw a Salmon taken in the Tames, which I present to y^r Honour hoping the tast thereof will meliorate my wine." That Sir

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Samuel could appreciate the good things of life as well as the best cavalier is seen in the message he sent to his father, Sir Oliver, who is in Parliament, where "wee sat in the House till six at night and fought the Babbell stoutly." Sir Samuel, to fortify his stout-hearted father for battle with the Parliamentary obstructives of his day, sends him a "Red Deer Pie, with which you shall receive three brace of Phesants, two couple of Tayle, six Cockes, two brace of Partridges and two dozen of Snipes." That he had some regard also to the pomps and vanities is seen from the order he gives to his father's confidential servant, Edward Bynion, who, there is reason to believe, was John Bunyan's uncle—his father's brother, Edward, who also married his mother's sister Rose. Bynion has found, "in Mr. Cubberd's shop French Scarlett" for Sir Samuel's cloake at two guineas a yard, as good as any in London. "To tryme the Cloake will require eight and a half dozens of Buttons and Loopes which, if they be rich will cost forty shillings a dozen," so that "cloake and tryming will come to £30." Remembering how much this sum meant in those days, it would not seem that the Presbyterian soldier whom Butler styles Sir Hudibras, erred on the side of parsimony or Puritan sadness.

As the commander under whom John Bunyan served his brief soldier life, we are interested in catching these few glimpses of him. He appears to have been a man of keen insight and strong common sense; his personal valour was as unquestioned as his military skill, and it was probably easier for Butler,

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after living under his roof, to lampoon him at a safe distance in his "Hudibras" than it was for the enemy to meet him in the fair encounter of an open field. Royalist ridicule of men who had grave and anxious duties to discharge in defending the ancient constitutional liberties of England may be very amusing to read, but it is not history, and must not be mistaken for it.*

Relating his experiences during those days, Bunyan says: "When I was a soldier I with others were drawn out to go to such a place to besiege it." The men at Newport were often called out for service elsewhere. The day before the Christmas of 1643, for example, a large siege party left the garrison, and stormed and took Grafton House, in Northamptonshire. The following month Captain Abercrombie set out with a hundred men of the new levies and took Hillesdon House; later in the same year Captain Ennis, sent out by Sir S. Luke, surprised and captured a party of Royalists near Bicester. In 1645 also, at the time Bunyan was in the army, Captain Bladwell received orders to march, with three hundred men of the Newport garrison, to Aylesbury, and thence to Farnham, there to await farther instructions. Probably as one of some such party Bunyan had been sent on some military operation on the occasion when,

* It would seem that Oliver Cromwell's eldest and most promising son served under Sir Samuel Luke, and died in Newport garrison, while he was governor. In the "Parliament Scout" for March 15-22, 1643-4, there is the following entry: "Cromwell hath lost his eldest son, who is dead of the smallpox in Newport [Pagnet], a civil young gentleman and the joy of his father."

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as he tells us, "once I fell into a creek of the sea, and hardly escaped drowning." The nearest creek of the sea to a midland county like Bedfordshire was a long way off, and it is probable that this deliverance from the sea, like that from the musket-ball, was one of the experiences of his soldier life.

It has been frequently stated, though Bunyan himself does not mention the fact, that he was at the siege of Leicester in the summer of 1645. The statement rests upon the authority of two writers, each of whom published a short sketch of Bunyan's life after his death. The first of these is simply worthless. It is entitled "An Account of the Life and Actions of Mr. John Bunyan, from his Cradle to his Grave." It was first printed at the end of the spurious third part of the "Pilgrim's Progress," and is evidently a mere piece of literary hack-work, made up from the "Grace Abounding." Where the writer is original he is manifestly wrong. He tells us, for example, that at the siege of Leicester the town was "vigorously defended by the King's forces against the Parliamentarians," the case, of course, being precisely the reverse. Then, by way of explaining how Bunyan came to be in the army, he says, "When the unnatural civil war came on, finding little or nothing to do to support himself *and small family*, he, as many thousands did, betook himself to arms." As at the time of the siege of Leicester Bunyan was sixteen years and seven months old, it is clear the writer knew very little either of Bunyan's "small family" or of Bunyan himself. Eventually this sketch was, for some reason, withdrawn, and another account of

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Bunyan's life, to which reference has been made, took its place in 1700. It professes to be written by a personal friend. The writer says that Bunyan, "being a soldier in the Parliament's army at the siege of Leicester in 1645, he was drawn out to stand sentinel, but another soldier voluntarily desiring to go in his room," was shot dead. He has evidently confused two separate stories, as he might easily do, writing some fifty years after the event. Bunyan himself says, "When I was a soldier I with others were drawn out to go to such a place to besiege it; but when I was just ready to go one of the company desired to go in my room, to which, when I had consented, he took my place; and coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel he was shot into the head with a musket-bullet, and died." Either, therefore, this account does not refer to the siege of Leicester, or Bunyan was not at that siege, for, wherever it was, he distinctly says that, though he was drawn to go, he did not actually go, because another man went in his place. Yet, though this personal friend of Bunyan's has thus confused two separate things, he was evidently quite sure in his own mind that Bunyan was at the siege of Leicester, and probably had it from his own lips. It is certain that there were soldiers from Newport garrison present at that siege, defending the town against the assault of the Royal forces. We know that these men from Newport, under Major Ennis, were placed in charge of that portion of the fortifications of Leicester called "the Newarke" or "new worke," on the south side of the town, near an old stone wall, against which Prince

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Rupert had directed the King's artillery to be planted. In this wall a large breach had been made, but was repaired and defended by Ennis, who twice drove back the enemy with great loss. For three hours after the rest of the town was taken Major Ennis and his Newport men maintained their position, and obtained good terms of capitulation, when they were surrounded, and had at last to surrender.

The stirring scenes and incidents of these soldier days, the many-phased aspects of life and contrasts of character presented on every side, would, of course, do much to widen the mind of the impressible lad from Elstow. It must have been a curious school of experience to be among these fighting, preaching, praying majors and captains, who could one day storm and take Grafton or Hillesdon House, and the next preach to edification in Newport Church. Eagerly taking in this new world, all so vivid to him, he marches, it may be, with Captain Bladwell to Aylesbury and the Surrey Downs, or stands with the men in Lathbury Field to hear Captain Hobson preach, or gives military salute in Newport garrison to Sir Samuel Luke, or along with Major Ennis fights amidst the rain of death on Leicester walls. The memories of these days came back in after years, making more intensely real to him the fight with Apollyon, the expedition of Greatheart, or the winning back of Mansoul for Emmanuel.

IV

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ON leaving the army Bunyan returned to his tinkering life at Elstow, and soon after took to himself a wife. Who she was and where he found her we have no means of knowing. There is no entry of the marriage in the register at Elstow, which may arise from the fact that he found her at a distance. Apparently she was an orphan and a native of some other place than Elstow, for she used to talk to Bunyan about her father as though they were unknown to each other, telling him "what a godly man he was and how he would reprove and correct vice both in his House and amongst his neighbours; what a strict and holy life he lived in his Days both in Word and Deed." We know not who she was, we do not even know her Christian name, but we do know that her advent brought to Bunyan what he had not had since his mother's death, a real home brightened by the presence of love. It was not brightened by much else. "This woman and I," says he, "came together as poor as poor might be, not having so much household stuff as a dish or spoon

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betwixt us both." It was an unpromising beginning, but many that are more promising turn out worse. It may be that where there are health and hope and honest industry, mutual love and trust can better supply the lack of dish and spoon than an abundance of dishes and spoons can supply the lack of love.

Though the young wife brought no dower of wealth to her husband, she brought to him that which wealth cannot buy—saintly memories of a godly home and trained instincts for good ; and, as we have seen, she would beguile their summer evening walks and their fireside winter talks by memories of the good man, her father, who had gone to heaven. She brought with her also two books which had been his, the one, "The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven," by Arthur Dent, the parish minister of Shoebury in Essex, and the other, "The Practice of Piety," by Lewis Bayly, a bishop of Bangor, in King James' time. "In these," says Bunyan, "I should sometimes read with her, wherein I also found some things that were somewhat pleasing to me."

These two books which he thus thought worthy of special mention had, both of them, an unusual run of popularity. "The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven" was a little square, vellum-bound, black-letter book of about four hundred pages, which was first published in 1601, and in 1637 had reached the twenty-fourth edition. It is in the form of a dialogue between four persons, who appear as a divine, a plain honest man, an ignorant man, and a caviller, and who having a long May day on their hands, repair by common consent "to yonder oke-tree, where there is a goodly

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arbour and handsome seats, and where they may all sit in the shadow and conferre of heavenly matters." The book seems to have filtered into Bunyan's mind and to have remained with him. Dent's book is for the most part wearisomely heavy, but there are in it racysayings and intensely English forms of expression, some of which remind us even of Bunyan himself. We come, for instance, upon such proverbial sayings as, "Who is so bold as blinde Baynard?" "He that never doubted never believed"; "Soft fire maketh sweet mault"; "A fool's bolt is soon shot"; and "Sweet meat will have sour sauce." Speaking of pride, the writer is satirical upon those who spend "a good part of the day in tricking and trimming, pricking and pinning, pranking and pouncing, girding and lacing and braving up themselves in most exquisite manner"; he likes not "these doubled and redoubled ruffles, these strouting fardingales, long locks, and foretufts"; and he thinks "it was never a good world since starching and steeling, buskes and whalebones, supporters and rebatoes, full moones and hobby horses came into use." "Even plain country folk," he says, "will flaunt it like courtiers, and the old proverb is verified, 'Everie Jacke will be a gentleman, and Joane is as good as my lady.'" The divine of the dialogue, speaking of oaths, objects even to men swearing by Cocke or Pie, or Mousefoot; whereupon the caviller says, "it seemeth you are an Anabaptist, you condemn all swearing"; from which we may infer that the Baptists of England were specially conspicuous for their simple yea, yea, and nay, nay, even before George Fox and the Quakers were born. It is further

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said that drunkenness is the "metropolitane Citie of all the Province of vices," and that the many "lazy lozels and luskish youths which doe nothing all the day long," forget that we must one day "give an account of our Baily-wicke." At the close of the dialogue the ignorant man of the party comes under deep concern about his moral state; whereupon the caviller asks him to go home with him and he can give him "a speedie remedie, for he has many pleasant and merry bookes, 'Bevis of Southampton'; 'Ellen of Rummin'; 'The Merrie Jest of the Frier and the Boy'; 'The Pleasant Story of Clem of the Clough'; 'Adam Bell and William of Cloudesley'; 'The odde tale of William, Richard, and Humfrey'; 'The Pretie Conceit of John Splinter's last Will and Testament'; which all are excellent and singular bookes against heart qualmes."

The other book in which Bunyan read with his wife was "The Practice of Piety." It was first published in 1612 by Lewis Bayly of Evesham, afterwards bishop of Bangor, and by 1673 had been printed above fifty times in English, besides many times in Welsh, French, Hungarian, Polish, and other Continental languages. Notwithstanding its distinctly ecclesiastical tone, the book was a great favourite with the Puritans. So wide was its renown that it became the subject of satire on the part of men not much given to reading it. It was to be found on the desk of the Justice of the Peace along with his Dalton's "Duties of a Magistrate." Peter Hansted, in 1644, satirises

a—

THE PRACTICE OF PIETY, BY LEWIS BAYLY, BISHOP OF BANGOR. 1673.

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Justice Parler on whose cushion ly
A Dalton and "Practice of Piety."

The book was introduced into Congreve's "Old Bachelor," and in 1788 Peter Pindar makes George III. say to Mr. Whitbread, who was the member for Bedford at that time—

I'm told that you send Bibles to your votes,
Pray'r books instead of cash to buy them coats—
Bunyan's and "Practices of Piety."

The effect of these books upon Bunyan's mind and heart was pleasing—pleasing only as yet—not convincing, not striking right home and giving him that despairing sense of sin through which he more than most men had to make his way to the better life. There was no cry from the depths as yet, but there were good desires coming up, and under their influence he went "to church twice a day, and that with the foremost." When there the natural reverence of his soul took forms not always elevating. The vine without trellis work to lift it up trails on the ground, and Bunyan's deeply religious nature not yet having found its healthful nutriment in eternal verities, expended itself in superstitious awe over sacred places and ecclesiastical persons. The high place in Elstow Church seemed to his vivid imagination like a piece of heaven brought down to earth, and the vicar, as he stood in the rude pulpit of former days, like a being of some supernal sphere; even that not very sublime personage the parish clerk came in for a share of adoration. "So overcome was I with the spirit of superstition that I adored, and that with

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great devotion, even all things (both the high place, priest, clerk, vestment-service, and what else) belonging to the church." It has been assumed that the form of service at Elstow Church during the Commonwealth was Presbyterian, but this description of the worship that Bunyan attended there between 1649 and 1652 does not seem much like it. A Presbyterianism that had "high place, priest, clerk, vestment-service, and what else," must have had services strangely like those of Episcopacy. Moreover, Christopher Hall, the vicar, was certainly an Episcopalian, for he entered upon the living in 1639, when Archbishop Laud was supreme; he remained there all through the Commonwealth period, and he certainly continued vicar of Elstow for four years after the Restoration, and therefore two years after the Act of Uniformity, signing the returns from the register in 1664. Either, therefore, Bunyan's spiritual guide in his Elstow days was a wonderfully pliant man, a veritable "vicar of Bray," or, there was considerably more tolerance for Nonconforming Episcopalians under Cromwell than there was for Nonconforming Quakers and Presbyterians under Charles. The services and officials familiar to Bunyan in Elstow Church, and his Sunday tipcat experiences on Elstow Green would seem to suggest that neither the law of 1645 against liturgical forms, nor the law of 1644 against Sunday sports, was very rigidly enforced in the remoter rural parishes of the land.

The four years of Bunyan's life which followed his marriage were those in which he went through the intense spiritual experiences he has described for us

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as with pen of fire in the "Grace Abounding." It was an awful time, yet it had its compensations. It gave him that mighty hold of men's hearts which more than most writers and preachers he has always had. He knew it himself. "For this reason I lay so long at Sinai, to see the fire and the cloud and the darkness, that I might fear the Lord all the days of my life upon earth, and tell of His wondrous works to my children." As he entered into the struggle of those fearful years he was overwhelmed with a sense of his own evil; he paints his moral condition in the darkest colours. Many writers think the colours too dark, the shadows more sombre than the truth required. Lord Macaulay, for example, may be taken as the type of a class who have undertaken to vindicate Bunyan's character against the charges of Bunyan himself. Probably Macaulay's natural temperament and his career of unruffled prosperity led him to take a somewhat complacent view both of this world and the next. Bunyan, on the contrary, had battled with the storm. He had looked down shudderingly into yawning depths and yearningly up to lofty heights, which when a man has once seen he can be complacent no more.

There are those who would probably consider any passionate agitation concerning the spiritual world as somewhat unreal and affected. They may be estimable neighbours and useful citizens, but, as Froude says of them, "be their talents what they may, they could not write a 'Pilgrim's Progress,' or ever reach the delectable mountains, or even be conscious that such mountains exist." There are two

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ways of looking at sin ; an easy-going way and a way that is more earnest. The more earnest way, which was Bunyan's, is that which looks upon sin in the light of the supreme anguish endured on Calvary for its expiation, and which sees in the sinner one of whom it is always true that he knows not what he does. This intenser way may seem to some to be overstrained, but it is in harmony with the whole literature of penitence from the Book of Psalms down to the latest utterance of the Christian ages ; it is the outcome of a living spirit which cannot be destroyed without destroying also all that is noblest in aspiration and most glorious in achievement in the moral history of the race.

In estimating the sinfulness of Bunyan's early life it must be remembered that sin may take a spiritual as well as a sensual form. The sins for which he reproached himself were not specially those of the flesh. He was never a drunkard, and in after years, when the occasion called for it, he passionately denied that he had ever been unchaste. But a man's weakness is often the reaction from his strength ; and he who of all men afterwards sought for reality and stood with worshipping awe before the sanctities of spiritual things was guilty of violent outrage against reverence and truth. The marvellous force which in after years displayed itself in vividness of spiritual vision and burning power of expression ran riot in weird blasphemies which made even blasphemers tremble. "Even as a child," he says, "I had few equals in cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God." The wickedness

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begun thus early lasted long. He was a grown man, when one who was "herself a loose and ungodly wretch," and therefore not over-nice, "protested that it made her tremble to hear him, that he was the ungodliest fellow for swearing ever she heard in all her life, and that it was enough to spoil all the youth in the whole town." Sins like these will be variously estimated. There is no ready gauge of outward consequence to measure their inward evil as in the case of drunkenness and impurity. Yet spiritual sins may be even more deadly than sensual in their moral recoil, laying waste the powers of the soul. It is not improbable that the spiritual condition induced by persistent lying and profane blasphemy had much to do with the prolonged and terrible struggles of Bunyan's after years.

The intensity of these struggles was, of course, largely due to the intensity of the spiritual nature in which they took place. As the storm sweeps most wildly and makes its dolefullest moaning through the tops of the tallest trees, the greatness of the man contributed to the greatness of his sufferings. They were intensified also by his ignorance and lack of spiritual guidance. Many of the shapes with which he wrestled in deepest anguish were the phantoms of his own heated imagination, the result of his own misinterpretation of the book of God. The battle which he was fighting was, of course, no phantom; it is the one battle of the ages for all who in a world of sin are seeking for the life of God; yet it might have been shortened and simplified by enlightened friendly aid. But it was Bunyan's misfortune to be

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surrounded by men who, either from want of sympathy or lack of light, could help him very little till his fiercest battle was fought out and ended. As in the case of his great contemporary, George Fox, men "spake not to his condition," but, and it was perhaps well, he was all the more thrown back upon God, and in the end, as always, God was faithful to His own.

There are some natures to whom the great spiritual world of the unseen is always present as the background of life. It was so with Shakespeare. It was so also with Bunyan, though in a different way. Even when he was a child, the wrong things of the day were followed by the remorse, and fears, and dread dreams of the night. But the real struggle began later, when after his marriage and the reading of his wife's books, he was seen "going to church twice a day, and that with the foremost." He had not done this long before there arose a fight with his conscience about Sunday sports, in the course of which there came the weird voices that seemed to be shouted into his ear on Elstow Green. Somewhere on the sward round the broken pillar of the old Market Cross he was one Sunday in the midst of a game of cat. He had struck it one blow from the hole and was about to strike it the second time, when, as he says, "A voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell? At this I was put to an exceeding maze. Wherefore, leaving my cat upon the ground, I looked up to heaven, and was as if I had with the eyes of my understanding seen the Lord Jesus looking down

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upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me." Thus conscience-stricken he afterwards made a desperate fling to be rid of conscience altogether, only to find, as other men have, that its grip was tighter than he thought. Then he swung round again and fell to some outward reformation, gave up swearing, took to reading the historical parts of the Bible, and set about keeping the commandments, which he flattered himself he did pretty well; so that in those days he thought he pleased God as well as any man in England. His neighbours were struck with the change, and wondered much to see Mad Tom of Bethlem become a sober man. Their exclamations of surprise flattered his vanity, he became proud of his godliness, and laid himself out for more and more of this kind of incense for about a twelvemonth or more. /

When a man comes under the dominion of conscience, and is a stranger to love, conscience is apt to become somewhat of a tyrant; a false standard is set up, and things right enough in themselves seem to become wrong to the man. Bunyan had hitherto taken pleasure in the somewhat laborious diversion of ringing the bells in the tower of Elstow Church. He began to think this was wrong, one does not quite see why; still, having this misgiving about it, he gave up his bell-ringing. But not the love of it. This seems to have lingered with him through life. Years afterwards, when he brings his pilgrims near to the Celestial City, he makes all the bells therein give them a peal of welcome, and when they pass within, leaving him without, he heard in his dream

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that "all the bells in the city rang again for joy." One can easily understand that in these Elstow days it was with many a pang and with reluctant step he turned from the belfry. He would come and lean against the old doorway, and look longingly while some neighbour pulled the bell-rope which he half felt to be his. Then he was afraid even to do this. How if the bells should fall? How if even the steeple itself should come down? About that very time a flash of lightning had struck one of the village churches of Bedfordshire, and "passing through the porch into the belfry, tripped up his heels that was tolling the bell, and struck him stark dead." What if this should happen again? So the bell-ringing went. Then there was the dancing with his neighbours in the old Moot Hall, or on the village green. If it was hard to give up the ringing, it was harder still to give up the dancing. It was a full year before he could quite leave that, but at last he did, and then thought he to himself, "God cannot choose but be pleased with me now."

But if it is distressing to feel discontent with one's self, it is dangerous to feel content; aspiration and not self-complacency is the law of healthful life; and He who was leading Bunyan by a way that he knew not, mercifully shook him out of this unwholesome self-satisfaction. It came about in this way. Going one day into Bedford, to work at his trade as a tinker, he saw, as everybody has heard, three or four poor women holding godly talk together as they sat at a door in the sunshine. He had by this time become somewhat of a brisk talker on religion himself; he

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therefore drew near and listened. He soon found however, that their talk was above him, and he had to remain silent. They moved in a world of which he knew nothing; they spoke of a holy discontent with themselves and of a new birth from above; they told how God had visited their souls with His love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and strengthened; they "spake as if joy did make them speak," with such "pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said," that they seemed to him to have found a new world to which he was altogether a stranger. He was humbled yet fascinated, drawn again and again into their company, and the more he went the more did he question his condition, the more there came over him a "great softness and tenderness of Heart, and a great Bending in his mind" towards godly meditation.

So free from self-consciousness is true life that he in whom faith was beginning to work mightily, now began to wonder whether he had any faith at all. How can he find out? Shall he put it to the test of miracle on the rain pools in the Elstow road? If they should dry up at his word then there would be no doubt. But if not! would not that be proof positive that he "had no Faith but was a castaway and lost?" It is a great risk to run, too great, "nay, thought I, if it be so, I will never try yet, but will stay a little longer."

Then blossomed into shape his wonderful power of dreaming waking dreams. There were these good

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people at Bedford sitting on the sunny side of a mountain, while he was separated from them by a wall all about, and shivering in the cold. Round and round that wall he goes to see if there be no opening, be it ever so narrow, and at last he finds one. But it is narrow, indeed so narrow that none can get through but those who are in downright earnest, and who leave the wicked world behind them. There is just room for body and soul, but not for body and soul and sin. It must be a strait gate through which a man gets rid of self; but by dint of sidling and striving he first gets in his head, then his shoulders, and then his whole body, at which he is exceeding glad, for now too he is in the sunshine and is comforted. But as yet this is only in a dream, and dreams tarry not. Before long he is out of sunshine into storm again. This man who was an elect soul, if ever there was one—elect through suffering to help other souls—begins to torment himself as to whether he is elect or not. Perhaps he is not. How if the day of grace be past and gone, and he has overstood the time of mercy? Oh, would that he had turned sooner! would he had turned seven years ago! Words cannot tell with what longings and breakings of soul he cried to heaven to call him, little thinking that the longings and breakings themselves were the very call for which he cried. Gold! could this blessing be gotten for gold, what would he have not given for it? For this the whole world would have gone ten thousand times over, if he had only had it. Meantime that very world went on its old way. How strange that it should; how strange that people

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should go hunting after perishable things with eternal things before them, that even Christian people should make so much of mere outward losses ! If his soul were only right with God, and he could but be sure that it was, he should count himself rich with nothing but bread and water.

Strange alternations of gloom and glory came over him. Sometimes his soul was visited with such visions of light and hope that he could have spoken of God's love and mercy to the very crows on the ploughed land before him. He thought then that he should never forget that joy even in forty years' time. But alas ! in less than forty days the vision was all faded and gone. Worse than gone, for there now came down upon him a great storm of conflict which handled him twenty times worse than before. Star after star died out of the firmament of his hope ; darkness seized upon him, and to his amazement and confusion a whole flood of doubts and blasphemies poured in upon his spirit. They seemed to be coming in from morning to night, and to be carrying him away as with a mighty whirlwind.

Yet even in that dark time of despair there was this redeeming gleam of hope, that while dreadful things were pouring into his soul, there was something within him that refused to tolerate them. If he is borne along, he goes struggling and crying for deliverance, like the child some gipsy is carrying off by force and fraud from friend and country. A man is safe so long as the citadel of his own will is kept. There is the turning-point of destiny—the centre of life's mystery. And all was right there. Floods of

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temptation came dashing against the outworks, but within he had, he says, great yearnings after God, and heart-affecting apprehensions of Him and His truth. So that he really was making way, getting out of himself more and on to the solid ground of divine fact. There began to come to him such words as these, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" and these, "He hath made peace by the blood of His cross." Fortunately too for him, some time before this the good people at Bedford had taken him to hear Mr. Gifford, their minister. Under his teaching how was his soul led on from truth to truth by the spirit of Truth! Even from the birth and cradle of the Son of God to His ascension and second coming, he was "orderly led" into the gospel story; and so vivid was everything that it seemed to him as if he had actually seen Christ born and grow up, seen Him walk through the world from the cradle to the cross, had actually leaped at the grave's mouth for joy that Christ was risen again, had actually, in spirit, seen Him at the right hand of the Father, and that on his behalf.

At this stage of his experience also it was his hap to light upon an old book, a book so old that it was ready to fall to pieces in his hand if he did but turn it over. Yet never was gold more precious. For he found his own condition so largely and profoundly handled in it, as if it had been written out of his own heart. It was a copy of the "Commentary on the Galatians," by Martin Luther, perhaps the one man of all the centuries most fitted to walk with Bunyan along that path of his journey which lay through the valley of the shadow of death. Bunyan, like his own

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Christian, "thought he heard the voice of a man as going before him." Grateful indeed was he for that. "This, methinks, I must let fall before all men. I do prefer this book of Martin Luther (excepting the Holy Bible) before all books that ever I have seen as most fit for a wounded conscience."

One temptation loomed large in his experience. He was urged, as he thought, by the tempter "to sell and part with the blessed Christ, to exchange Him for the things of this life—for anything." Day and night almost for a whole year it was with him, so that he could not so much as "stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast his eye to look on anything, without the whisper coming into his soul, 'Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that; sell Him—sell Him.'" His mental agitation would show itself in bodily movement. He would thrust forth his hands or elbows in deprecation, and as fast as the destroyer said, "Sell Him," he would say back to him, "I will not, I will not; no, not for thousands, thousands, thousands of worlds." So he held out and held on, but at length one morning, as he lay in his bed under unusually fierce temptation, he felt the thought pass through his mind, "'Let Him go if He will!' Now was the battle won and down fell I, as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree, into great guilt and fearful despair." The great guilt was of course a great delusion, the mere outcome of a vivid brain giving concrete shape to its own creations. But though the sin of which he accused himself was imaginary, very far from imaginary was the inward misery it occasioned. No sin, thought he, was like his: it was point-blank against his

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Saviour. With all his picturesque power he puts his case in imagery the most varied. He is, he says, like a broken vessel, driven as with the winds; as those that jostle against the rocks, more broken, scattered, and rent; he is as a house whose foundations are destroyed; as a drowning child in a mill-pond; or he seems to himself to be standing at the gate of the City of Refuge, trembling for deliverance and with the avenger of blood close at his heels.

He remembered long years afterwards how at this dark time he went one day into Bedford and, spent and weary, sat down upon a settle in the street. It seemed to him then as if the very sun in the heavens, did grudge to give him light, as if the very stones in the street and the tiles upon the houses did bend themselves against him. "O how happy now was every creature over I was! for they stood and kept fast to their station, but I was gone and lost." The worst, however, was now past, and daylight was near. As if in echo to his own self-reproaches a voice seemed to say to him, "This sin is not unto death." He wondered at the fitness and the unexpectedness of the sentence thus shot into his soul. The "power and sweetness and light and glory that came with it also were marvellous." Then again one night as he retired to rest there came to him the quieting assurance: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," and next morning it was still fresh upon his soul. Again when doubts came as to whether the blood of Christ was sufficient to save him, there came also the words: "He is able." "Methought this word *able* was spoken loud unto me—it showed a great word, it seemed to

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be writ in great letters." One day as he was passing into the field, still with some fears in his heart, suddenly this sentence fell into his soul, " 'Thy righteousness is in heaven ' ; and methought withal I saw with the eye of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand. I saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse ; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Now did my chains fall from my legs indeed ; I was loosed from my afflictions and irons. Oh, methought, Christ, Christ, there was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes ! I could look from myself to Him and should reckon that all those graces of God that now were green on me, were yet but like those crack-groats and fourpence halfpennies that rich men carry in their purses, when their gold is in their trunks at home ! Oh ! I saw my gold was in my trunk at home ! In Christ my Lord and Saviour ! Now Christ was all ; all my wisdom, all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption ! "

V

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THE three or four godly women whom Bunyan heard talking together in the summer sunshine about their experiences of a diviner life, introduced him, he tells us, to their minister, Mr. Gifford, and to the little Christian community of which they were members. This simple brotherhood of believers is interesting to us for its own sake, as furnishing one of the phases of religious life during the English Commonwealth ; and interesting also for the sake of Bunyan himself, who for the next five-and-thirty years of his life was closely associated with its history, first as a private member, and afterwards as its pastor. It may be worth while, therefore, to go back over the years between 1640 and 1650, and see how this Church at Bedford came to be founded, and how it took the shape it did.

In February 1642 a Bill was passed for the exclusion of bishops from Parliament ; and in June of the following year an ordinance was enacted and entered on the Journals of the House of Lords, to the effect that as “ the present Church government by arch-

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bishops, bishops, their chancellors, commissaries, deans and chapters, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical officers depending on the hierarchy is evil, and justly offensive and burdensome to the kingdom . . . the same shall be taken away, and such government settled in the Church as may be agreeable to God's Holy Word." By the same ordinance, the ecclesiastical committee known as the Westminster Assembly of Divines was appointed to confer upon such matters affecting the liturgy, discipline, and government of the Church as Parliament should propose. This body consisted of one hundred and forty-nine persons named in the ordinance, one hundred and nineteen of these being divines fixed upon a year before. To this assembly Thomas Dillingham, the minister of Deane, and Oliver Bowles, the rector of Sutton, were called from Bedfordshire. Dillingham was too old and infirm to take his seat, and Bowles died the following year.

The old system of government by bishops being set aside, then came the anxious question as to what form the New State Church should take. In London and Lancashire Presbyterianism, duly organised and established, had taken the place of Episcopalianism. It was not altogether a new thing in the country; for as early as 1572 a Presbytery had been set up at Wandsworth, in Surrey, and under the direction of the celebrated Thomas Cartwright, Presbyterianism attained such dimensions that between 1580 and 1590 there were no fewer than five hundred beneficed clergy of the Church of England, most of them Cambridge men, who were pledged to the revised form

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of the Wandsworth Directory of Discipline. The movement was especially strong in the counties of Essex, Cambridge, Northampton, Leicester, Rutland and Warwick. "Classes" were held secretly at the Bull, at Northampton, under the presidency of Edward Snape, curate of St. Peter's in that town, and attended by the clergy of Higham Ferrars, Wellingborough, and eight or nine other neighbouring towns. This movement was not without significance, and though it was put down by Archbishop Whitgift, it still lingered, a silent thought, in the hearts of many all through the reigns of James and Charles. As soon, therefore, as the Long Parliament had dispensed with bishops there was once more a Presbyterian movement in England. For about two years it seemed as if it were about to carry all before it. In 1643 the Solemn League and Covenant, which, by the way, must not be confounded with the Scottish National Covenant of 1638, was ordered to be subscribed and sworn to by the whole English realm. The Houses of Parliament set the example in St. Margaret's Church, and in the country the signing went on for months, the Covenant becoming the watchword of party and the test paramount of the citizen. In every parish church it was read aloud to the congregation, who were called upon to swear to it with uplifted hands, and afterwards to sign it with name or mark, all refusals being duly reported. Governors of towns and garrisons were required to impose it upon their soldiers. No subject could practise in the courts of law, or become a common council-man, or hold office of trust till he had pledged

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himself. Copies of the Covenant, having attached to them the names of all parishioners above the age of eighteen, are still to be found among corporation records and in parish archives. In the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, there is a copy which was found a few years ago in the roof of the old rectory of Swyneshed, to the north of Bedfordshire, and bearing the signatures of Thomas Whitehand, the minister, and fifty of his parishioners. He had evidently not liked to destroy it, even after the Restoration came in. He had seen Episcopacy displaced by Presbyterianism, and then again Presbyterianism by Episcopacy; and in this uncertain world who could say what might happen again? The coil of parchment, therefore, was not shrivelled in flame, but hidden away in the old rectory roof, where it came to light in this generation, bearing the names of the parishioners who had signed it in the summer months of 1644.

The following January saw the climax of Presbyterianism in England, for on the 4th of that month an Ordinance of the Commons passed the Lords, abolishing the use of the Prayer Book and adopting the New Westminster Directory, a subsequent Act of Parliament decreeing that England as well as Scotland should be Presbyterianised. But it is one thing to pass an Act of Parliament and quite another to secure the religious assent of a nation. From various causes the work hung fire. Even in London and Lancashire the system was not organised till the following year, and the rest of the country was less eager still. The Episcopalians were naturally averse,

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and at the opposite pole of thought were many who were favourable to a Congregational form of polity, and held that the early churches were separate brotherhoods of believers. Ever since the days of Elizabeth there had been voluntary associations based on this principle in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and London. Some of their leaders perished on the scaffold, but their convictions did not perish with them. The principle they laid down was that "the magistrate is not to meddle with religion or matter of conscience, nor compel men to this or that form of religion, because Christ is King and Lawgiver of the Church and Conscience." These convictions lived on, obtaining wider lodgment in the hearts of Christian men, and, through the lips of Philip Nye, the vicar of Kimbolton, and four others, found expression even in the Westminster Assembly itself. Many were beginning to think that the Presbyterianism of that time was not as wide and tolerant as it might be, and that there was little use in merely exchanging one form of yoke for another.

These opinions found strong support in Bedfordshire at a very early stage in the national conflict. It so happened that there was in the county at that time, as rector of one of its parishes, a man of considerable intellectual force and strong individuality of character, with whom we shall find Bunyan in close personal relations at a later period, and who did more than most men in furthering these views both in the army and in the nation. This was William Dell, the rector of Yelden. He was a native of Bedfordshire, having been born near Maulden or Weston-

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ing, was a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and had been episcopally ordained. When Dr. Pocklington was sequestered in 1642, Dell succeeded him in the rectory of Yelden, and as his parish was near to Melchbourne Park, he was brought into frequent intercourse with the Earl of Bolingbroke, who with the Countess attended his ministry, which they seem greatly to have valued. Through this connection Dell was brought into intimate relation with all the great Commonwealth leaders. In 1645-6 he was chaplain to the army under General Fairfax, and was the person appointed to bring the articles of the surrender of Oxford to Parliament. In 1649, on the sequestration of Thomas Batchcroft, he was made master of Gonville and Caius College, still retaining his Bedfordshire rectory, and was one of the commissioners sent to attend Charles I. before his execution. His position while with the army gave him great influence and many opportunities of spreading his opinions among the leaders of the time, and his sermons both before the House of Commons and in the country were matter of frequent debate in Parliament and of entries in the Journals of both Houses. He strenuously resisted the establishment of any national form of religion. He held strong views on the spirituality of the Church of Christ, and was averse to all stereotyped uniformity in its organisation and worship.

Dell did not see what was to be gained by overthrowing an establishment of Episcopacy only to set up an establishment of Presbyterianism. "For what," asks he, "is a National Assembly but an

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Archbishop multiplied, and what a Provincial Assembly but a Bishop multiplied? and a Classical but a Dean and Archdeacon multiplied? Thus, the former lords being removed, the Church would swarm with other Lords, and Christ's own kingdom would never be suffered to return to Christ's own lordship and dominion." In the true Church of Christ, Dell goes on to say, there are no distinctions nor differences of persons, no clergy or laity, all are as Peter says, "A chosen generation, a royal priesthood." Presbyters and bishops differ only in office, not in character, from the rest of the Church, and that office they receive from the Church, as an alderman or common council-man differs from the rest of the citizens, not in themselves, but only by the city's choice. "And all Churches are equal as well as all Christians, all being sisters of one mother, beams of one sun, branches of one vine, streams of one fountain, members of one body, branches of one golden candlestick, and so equal in all things."*

Such were the opinions of William Dell of Yelden, opinions which greatly influenced the course of Free Church life in the neighbouring town of Bedford. In 1650 a church was founded on these principles, which has continued down to our own times.

This was the church with which for five-and-thirty years Bunyan's religious life was closely identified. Its records have fortunately been preserved, presenting a vivid picture of the reality and earnestness of the majority of those who first composed its fellowship.

* "Select Works of William Dell," London, 1773.

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Prefixed to the minutes of the acts of the church there is a short historical sketch, commencing thus :

“In this Towne of Bedford and the places adjacent there hath of a long time bene persons godly, who in former times (even while they remained without all forme and order as to visible Church Communion according to y^e Testament of Christ) were very zealous according to their light, not onely to edify themselves but also to propagate the Gospell and help it forward, both by purse and presence, keeping always a door open and a table furnished, and free for all such ministers and Christians who shewed their zeale for and love to the Gospell of Christ. Among these that reverend man, Mr. John Grew, was chief, also Mr. John Eston, sen., and brother Anthony Harrington, with others; Men that in those times were enabled of God to adventure farre in shewing their detestation of y^e bishops and their superstitions. But as I saide, these persons with many more neither were, nor yet desired to be, embodied into fellowship according to y^e order of the Gospell; onely they had in some measure separated themselves from the prelatieall superstitions, and had agreed to search after the non-conforming men, such as in those dayes did beare the name of Puritanes. But when it pleased God (who had before appointed that holy ordinance of the Communion of Saintes) to shew His mercy to this people, He placed Mr. John Gifford among them for their minister in Christ Jesus, and to be their pastor and bishop, and the steward of God to com-

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municate unto them the knowledge of His will in the holy mysteryes of the Gospel."

This man who is thus introduced to us as the founder of the Bedford Church, and who left upon it so powerfully the impress of his own individuality, was as little likely at one time to do this kind of work as was Saul of Tarsus to become Paul the Apostle. He was a Kentish man, and at the outbreak of the Civil War a Royalist and a major in the King's army. In 1648 there was made in that county one more desperate struggle to win back the country for the king. The rising was begun by the Kentish people themselves, but the Earl of Norwich came down to place himself at their head, and was joined by the well-known Bedfordshire Royalist, Lord Cleveland, of Toddington. Canterbury, Dover, Sandwich, and the castles of Walmer and Deal had been already won back from the Parliament when, towards the end of May, some ten or twelve thousand of the men of Kent were marching for London, with drums and banners. At Rochester they were met by the Parliamentary forces under the Lord General Fairfax; but it was at Maidstone there came on the fiercest of the fight. The struggle first began about a mile from the town, at seven o'clock in the evening, the forces of Fairfax driving the Royalists from thicket and fence, from hedge to hedge, till the town was reached. There, too, the battle was waged as hotly as ever. Street by street, turning by turning, house by house, Maidstone was fought for to the death. That Thursday night was long remembered as one of

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the most awful times in the whole history of the war. All the time the fight was raging the rain came down in torrents, while eight pieces of cannon, mingling with the storm, were fired at close range upon the mass of struggling men fighting with each other, in the streets, for life and death. It was not till between twelve and one o'clock in the morning that victory declared for Fairfax, the insurgents leaving 300 of their number dead in the streets. In addition to these, 1400 Royalists surrendered as prisoners, some of them being taken in the early morning as they were hiding in the woods, hop-gardens, and fields round the town. Among these prisoners was John Gifford. From the leading part he had taken and the resolute spirit he had shown he was marked out for signal punishment, for while the great body of the prisoners were afterwards released this man and eleven others were adjudged to the gallows.*

"But," continues the Church record, "ye night before he was to dye, his sister coming to visit him and finding the sentinells that kept the doore asleep, and those also his companions within heavy through drinke, she told him of the doore and the watch that stood before it, and intreated him to take the opportunity to escape and save his life, which also he did and passed through them all, there being, as it were, a deep sleep from the Lord upon them, and made

* "Letter from Lord General Fairfax to Speaker Lenthall," dated Rochester, June 6th, 1648. "Newes from Bowe," Rochester, June 4th, 1648. "Narrative of the Great Victory in Kent." London: Robert Ibbitson in Smithfield, 1648. "Bloody Newes from Kent," June, 1648. "King's Pamphlets," British Museum.

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his escape into y^e field, and, creeping into the bottom of a ditch, lay there about three dayes, till the great search for him was over, and then by the help of his friends he came disguised to London, where he abode not long, but was convayed downe into this country, where he also lay hid from his enemyes in y^e houses of certaine great persons who were of like mind with himself. And after a while he came to Bedford and there, being utterly a stranger, he professed and practised physicke, but abode still very vile and debauched in life, being a great drinker, gamester, swearer, &c. But in his gaming, so it was that he usually came off by the losse, which would sometimes put him into some dumpish and discontented fitts and resolutions to leave y^e practise : but these resolutions were but like the chaines on the man mentioned in the Gospell which would not hold when the fit to be vile was upon him, wherefore he went on and broke them still. But one night having lost, as I take it, about 15^{li.}, it put him into a rage and he thought many desperate thoughts against God. But while he was looking into one of Mr. Bolton's bookes something therein took hold upon him and brought him into a great sense of sin, wherein he continued for y^e space of a moneth or above. But at last God did so plentifully discover to him by His word the forgiveness of his sins for the sake of Christ, that (as he hath by severall of the brethren bene heard to say) all his life after, which was about y^o space of five yeares, he lost not the light of God's countenance—no, not for an houre, save only about two dayes before he dyed."

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This man, thus brought through strange experiences, no sooner found the new life stirring within him than he sought the companionship of those who were in Christ before him. But, as in the case of the convert more illustrious than he, the brethren were afraid of him and "would not at first believe that he was a disciple." Yet, "being naturally bold," he minded not their shyness but "would inquire after their meetings, and would thrust himself againe and againe into their company both together and apart." Still they held themselves aloof; they were doubtful of a convert who "had indeed been a very vile man, who had done wild things in the town of public notoriety, and who often had thought to kill bro: Harrington, meerly from that great antipathy that was in his heart against the people of God and the holynes of the Gospell."

"But so it was that in little time he was much in his heart put upon it to preach, but yet would not without he advised first with the godly; but they being at a stand in the case he first offered his gift before them in private, and afterwards in an open way before the world; whose word God so blessed that even at the first he was made through grace a father to some through the Gospell, ffor instance, sister Cooper, a woman whose memory is yet precious among us, was converted by the first sermon he preached in publicke.

"Now, having continued preaching awhile and receiving some light in the Congregational way, after some acquaintance also with other ministers, he attempted to gather into Gospell fellowship the

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saintes and brethren in and about the towne; but the more antient professors being used to live, as some other good men of those times, without regard to such separate and close communion, were not at first so ready to fall into that godly order.

“Wherefore many dayes were by him and them set apart for prayer to seeke of God light and counsaile therein; they also conferred with members of other societyes; and at last by the mercy and goodness of God they began to come to some blessed resolution therein. And first they consulted after they had determined to walke together in the fellowship of the Gospell, and so to build an house for the name of our God, who were most expedient to begin to be laide in this building as foundation stones. And at length twelve of the holy brethren and sisters began this holy worke, viz., Mr. John Grew and his wife, Mr. John Eston, the elder, Anthony Harrington and his wife, Mr. John Gifford, sister Coventon, sister Bosworth, sister Munnes, sister ffenne, and sister Norton, and sister Spencer; all antient and grave Christians well knowne one to another, sister Norton being the youngest.

“The manner of their putting themselves into the state of a Church of Christ was: After much prayer and waiting upon God and consulting one with another by the word, they, upon the day appointed for this solemne worke, being met after prayer and seeking God as before with one consent they joyntly first gave themselves to the Lord and one to another by the will of God.

“This done, they with one mouth made choyce of

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brother Gifford to be their pastor, or Elder, to minister to them the things of the kingdome of Christ, to whom they had given themselves before ; wherefore brother Gifford accepted of the charge and gave himsele up to the Lord and to His people, to walke with them, watch over them, and dispense the misteryes of the Gospell among them under that consideration by which he was chosen of them.

“ Now the principle upon which they thus entered into fellowship with one another, and upon which they did afterwards receive those that were added to their body and fellowship, was *ffaith in Christ and Holiness of life*, without respect to this or that circumstance or opinion in outward and circumstantiall things. By which meanes grace and faith was encouraged, Love and Amity maintained, disputings and occasion to janglings and unprofitable questions avoyded, and many that were weake in the faith confirmed in the blessing of eternal life.”

The Bedford Church thus founded upon this large and catholic basis was apostolic in numbers as well as in simplicity of spirit, consisting at first of twelve believing souls. We have already met with some of them ; for among these twelve were the three or four poor women whose talk at some door in a Bedford street made a new era in the life of the listening tinker from Elstow. The brethren who were among the “ foundation stones ” of this new spiritual house were men of character and influence. Gifford, formerly a major, was now practising as a physician in the town, for which he may have been prepared before the wars came on. That there was room just

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then for a new medical practitioner in Bedford there is the following entry in the corporation records to show : " Request was made by Mr. Dr. Banister, Dr. of Physic, to the Council, for an Act of Ease to be passed for him in regard of his great age and debilitie of bodie." The request was granted, and the doctor freed from all liability to public office or appearance "at anie Councill Court or other Assemblie of this town." There was, therefore, clearly room for a successor in the healing art, and, qualified or unqualified, John Gifford took the place. Then next we come upon the name of "that reverend man, John Grew." He had been mayor of the town in 1646; he was again mayor in 1655; he was one of the churchwardens of St. Paul's Church in 1635; his name appears in the list of Justices of the Peace for Michaelmas term 1650; and by an order of the Council of State of December 2nd of the same year he was made one of the Commissioners of Militia for the county of Bedford. In his will, executed in 1661, he is described as a gentleman, and he appoints as his executors his "beloved friends Wm. Whitbread, of Cardington, Esq., and John Whitman, of the same place, yeoman." Anthony Harrington, again, though only a tradesman of the town, a cooper, seems to have been a man in fair position and repute, as we judge from the fact that he was one of the Common Councilmen in 1659; and his prominent standing among the Christian men of the town had singled him out for the especial hatred of John Gifford in the old bad days of his ungodly life. In the after days of persecution of 1669, when the flame waxed

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fiercest, Harrington in his old age was forced to flee from his home to a place of hiding. Thither a letter was addressed to him by the Church, in which they speak to him in much affection and say: "We are comforted in the remembrance of thee, brother, while we consider that notwithstanding thy naturall infirmity yet thou prizest good conscience above thine own enjoyments; and since thou couldest not with quiet enjoy it at home thou hast left thy concerns in this world (though in much hazzard and danger) that thou mayest keep it abroad."

But of the first members of the Church perhaps John Eston was locally the most eminent. He was an elderly man in 1650, when the Church was formed; for, as the register of St. Paul's shows, he had a son born to him in 1611, and his wife, Susanna Eston, had died, leaving him a widower in 1640. He was one of the Estons of Holme, in Bedfordshire, and his grandfather appears in the Visitation of the county in 1566. He himself was thrice mayor of Bedford, being mayor the year the Church was formed; he was also in the commission of the peace. His son after him was high sheriff of the county and a justice of the peace, both for the county and borough.

The records of this Church were not formally kept till 1656, or six years after its formation. We have no means now of knowing where was their place of meeting during the first three years of their church-life. It appears, however, from the town records and the register of St. John's church that in 1653 the little community, while continuing in all other respects to conduct its affairs on Congregational prin-

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ciples, became part of the State Church of the Commonwealth. The fact is interesting as an illustration of the comprehensive character of the Cromwellian settlement of religion ; and it came about in the following way.

In 1280 one Robert Parys, or De Parys, founded on the south side of the town of Bedford what was called the Hospital of St. John the Baptist. It was provided by the foundation that one master and one chaplain should "pray for the souls of the said Robert and Henry Saynt John and John his son, his nephews, and of all those who should give lands for the Hospitall," and that relief should be given to "such poor folk as chance to be dwellers in the town of Bedford." Even before the Reformation the church of the hospital had become the church of the parish, and the master its rector, the parish being but small, and containing, in 1546, no more than "87 houselinge people." At what time the right of presentation to the living was vested in the mayor and corporation of the town is uncertain ; but it had been in their hands for centuries when, in 1653, Theodore Crowley, the then master and rector, for some cause unknown to us, was sequestered. It so happened that at that time Puritan and Parliamentary influence was predominant in the council, and the corporation presented John Gifford to the living, in the place of Theodore Crowley

To us, whose conception of a State Church has grown up after the establishment for more than two centuries of one exclusive form of ecclesiastical polity, the Episcopal, it is strange to see a Congregational community in possession of the parish church, and its

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pastor installed there as rector. This could not, of course, have happened at any other time than between the years 1653 and 1660. During these seven years Cromwell's Broad Church was really broad—broader than anything ever known in this country either before or since, for it recognised and comprised the various forms of religious conviction to be found in the nation.

Abstractly considered, of course, there is no substantial reason why only one form of Church polity, and that confessedly not the earliest, should have place in a national settlement. There are grave objections to any State system of religion ; but if there is to be one at all, Cromwell certainly hit upon the fairest that has yet been tried. Even that was not altogether fair—no State Church can keep quite clear of injustice—for Roman Catholics were disabled from voting and disqualified for election, and all such infidels and heretics as attacked the Christian faith were deprived of the electoral franchise. But taking into account simply the various sections of Protestant Christians in the country, there was literally no Act of Uniformity. The rights of patrons were not to be interfered with by the Commissioners. A certificate was required from some responsible persons to whom the presented minister was known, simply testifying that he was a worthy man and a fit person to take the cure of souls. This was all. No articles of faith were prescribed, no subscription was enforced, and no mention made by name either of Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, or of the question of baptism. If the Commissioners conserved the rights

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of patrons, they were not limited by any other statutory conditions, and were guided by no creed, statute, canon, or established usage.

Taking the country through, the commission for the different counties was variously composed. Upon it were Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists. Access to benefices, therefore, was permitted to ministers of all three denominations. Episcopalians, also, were eligible, provided they would consent not to use the Book of Common Prayer, and as a matter of fact many of them were admitted.

Cromwell's Establishment, therefore, recognised no one form of ecclesiastical organisation ; it had no Church courts, no Church assemblies, no Church laws, no Church ordinances. Nothing was said about rites and ceremonies, nothing even about sacraments. The mode of administering the Lord's Supper and Baptism was left an open question to be determined by each congregation for itself. All that the Commissioners dealt with was the personal piety and intellectual fitness of the man presented to the living. If, in these respects, he were shown to be worthy he was at once installed. The church buildings were regarded as the property of the parish, and in one there was to be found a Presbyterian community, in another an Independent, and in a third a Baptist church. If there were churches which preferred to worship outside the national system altogether they were at liberty to do so. The Articles of Government declare that such persons "shall not be restrained, but shall be protected in the profession of the faith and exercise of their religion, so as they

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abuse not their liberty to the civil injury of others, and to the actual disturbance of the public peace on their part." This liberty, however, was "not to extend to Popery or Prelacy, nor to such as, under the profession of Christ, held forth and practised licentiousness."*

Under this elastic system of church-life, introduced into England in 1653, there was, of course, nothing to prevent the Bedford corporation from presenting, or the local Commissioners from admitting, John Gifford to the mastership and rectory of the hospital and Church of St. John. For, though he had not before been a parish minister, he was the recognised pastor of the Church formed under his care; his blameless life during the past three years had secured for him the name of "holy Mr. Gifford"; and the consciences of his hearers had testified to the reality of his call as a teacher of the truth of God. Presented he was, therefore, and in the summer of 1653 he took possession of the ancient hall of the rectory, and his people of the parish church of St. John the Baptist close by.

The year that Gifford entered into residence at St. John's was the year that Bunyan joined the Church. The Record of the Acts of the Church was not commenced till 1656, or three years later; but the Roll of members was kept from the foundation of the Church in 1650, and Bunyan's name appears as the nineteenth on the list, the names next to his being those of William Whitbread of Cardington, and Lettice his wife, from whom has descended the

* Articles xxxvi., xxxvii.; "Parl. Hist.," iii. 1425.

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present Samuel Whitbread, Esq., of Southill, in Bedfordshire.

Gifford was Bunyan's guide and helper only for two years after this, for he died in the early part of September 1655. But little is known of him beyond the facts already given. He came to Bedford, as we have seen, a lonely fugitive in the summer of 1648, and afterwards married there, gathering his family about him. In the register of St. Paul's church there is the record of a burial on June 30, 1651, of John, son of John Gifford. His other three children were daughters. He died in the prime of life, and appears to have known, some weeks before, that he was fatally stricken.

He was pastor of the church at Bedford not quite five years, yet he left his mark, broad and deep, and his work remains. He was a man of sufficient force of character to be capable of impressing powerfully men who were themselves of strong individuality. The "great extravagancy of minde and wildenes of heart," said to have been in his nature when he was the Royalist Saul, were turned into chastened fervour and force when he became the Puritan Paul. Bunyan tells us how real the man was, and how real he himself felt his teaching to be. Others, too, who came under his influence, showed in the deepest experience of their lives how vital that influence was. The three or four poor women who looked up to him as their pastor, and whom Bunyan heard talking together of the things of God, were evidently well instructed in the lore of the kingdom. "They spake as if Joy did make them speak: they spake with such pleasant-

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ness of Scripture Language and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new World." Gifford, therefore, could say with Paul, "Need we epistles of commendation? Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men." Bunyan, drawn by them under the same influence, bore testimony in his turn to the soul-subduing power of this converted Royalist major. "These people," says he, "told Mr. Gifford of me, who himself also took occasion to talk with me, and was willing to be well-persuaded of me, though I think but from little grounds." Evangelist was clearly a man of insight. "He invited me to his House, where I should hear him confer with others about the dealings of God with their Souls, from all which I received more conviction." Farther on also in that stern story of spiritual conflict told in the "Grace Abounding," he says, "At this time I sat under the ministry of holy Mr. Gifford, whose Doctrine, by God's Grace, was much for my stability. This man made it much his business to deliver the People of God from all those false and unsound rests that, by nature, we are prone to take and make to our souls. He would bid us take special heed that we took not up any truth upon trust, as from this or that, or any other man or men, but to cry mightily to God that He would convince us of the reality thereof and set us down therein, by His own Spirit, in the Holy Word."

Gifford left no writings behind him save one solitary letter written from his death-bed, a letter which Southey has described as "wise, tolerant, and truly

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Christian," and which was addressed, "To the Church over which God made me an Overseer when I was in the world."

After signing this letter in the presence of two of the brethren, Gifford went home to be with God. No stone marks the spot where he was buried in the churchyard of St. John's, but there his dust lies—mingling with that of the long line of masters and rectors, of bedesmen and brethren, stretching through more than six hundred years, and of whom he was one.

VI

FIVE YEARS OF BEDFORD LIFE: 1655-1660

It has been already mentioned that Bunyan was formally received to the Church at Bedford in 1653, at which time he was still living on at Elstow. In his account of himself he is provokingly reticent in the matter of dates, but it was probably in 1651 or 1652 that he began to come into Bedford to listen to the preaching of John Gifford. His doing so created an unusual stir among his neighbours, and brought unexpected fame to the preacher. That a "town-sinner" so notorious should become so changed, brought over the people of Elstow to hear for themselves. "When I went out," says he, "to seek the Bread of Life, some of them would follow me and the rest be put into a muse at home. Yea, almost all the town at first at times would go out to hear at the place where I found good. Yea, young and old for a while had some reformation on them; also, some of them perceiving that God had mercy on me, came crying to Him for mercy too." So that

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Gifford soon found that this was no ordinary convert who had come under his influence.

As we know from the parish register, Bunyan continued to live at Elstow for about two years after his reception into the Bedford Church. Mary, his blind child, and Elizabeth, his second daughter, were both born there, as these entries in the register show :

“ Mary, the daughter of John Bonion, was baptized the 20th day of July, 1650.”

“ Elizabeth, the daughter of John Bonyon, was born 14th day of April, 1654.”

The birthplace of these two children was the little roadside dwelling in the village of Elstow, still pointed out as Bunyan's cottage. Within living memory it was a thatched building with a lean-to forge at the south end, but there is now little of the original structure left beyond the walls and the oak beam of the interior.

It was, therefore, after the birth of his second daughter, in 1654, and probably in the year 1655, that Bunyan removed altogether from Elstow and went to live in Bedford. The town into which he thus removed his household, the implements of his craft, and his few simple belongings, was even then one of the most ancient boroughs in the kingdom. Its earliest existing charter, of the reign of Henry II., is simply confirmatory of charters earlier still by which there were secured to its burgesses the same custom, law, and liberty as those possessed by the citizens of Oxford. They were to be “quit of toll and pontage, of stallage, lastage and passage, and of assorts, and

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of all other customs throughout England and Normandy, by earth and by water, by sea-beach, biland, and bistrand." The corporation of the town consisted of the customary mayor, aldermen, and councillors, with recorder, deputy-recorder, town clerk, bailiffs, and chamberlains, with minor and less dignified, but perhaps not less necessary officers, in the shape of beadle, field-drivers, bucket-keepers, ale-tasters, fish and flesh searchers, and wood and chimney searchers.

In Bunyan's time, Bedford consisted of the same five parishes as at present, but the houses were widely scattered. There were large enclosures of field and orchard within the borough boundaries; and the population was only between one and two thousand. In the previous century there were 800 "houseling people" in the parish of St. Paul, and as another return in Elizabeth's time states the number of families in the whole town at 191, 135 of these being in the parish of St. Paul, the entire population would be then a little over a thousand.* A century later, according to the Hearth Tax list of 1673, there were 446 householders in the town, and therefore a population a little over two thousand.†

It goes without saying that the general appearance of the town has greatly changed since Bunyan was a dweller within its borders. Till within quite recent

* Harleian MSS. 618.

† S. P. Subsidies—Hearth Tax, 25 Car. II. The 446 householders were thus distributed: Parish of St. Paul, 256; St. Cuthbert, 47; St. Peter, 23; St. Mary, 73; St. John, 47. These numbers include those who were too poor to pay chimney-money and were exempted by legal certificate.

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times some of the buildings in the High Street were roofed with thatch, and their windows sheltered by primitive shutters which were lowered downwards upon hinges. Few, indeed, of the old buildings of his time remain to ours. Some of the churches are substantially the same, though enlarged. The interesting gateway of the pre-Reformation hostelry, known as the Old George, and portions of the Franciscan Friary still linger among more modern erections. But the ancient bridge with its picturesque gateways and its prison chamber midway over the stream; the Old Swan at the foot of the bridge; the Guildhall Chamber which, with the pillory and maypole, stood in the High Street; the county gaol at the corner of the Silver Street, so memorable to Bunyan and to us; the old buildings with butcher-row and fish-shops, which, as so often in the olden time, were crowded close to the churchyard wall and seemed almost to hustle the dead with the needs of the living—all are gone. With them also have disappeared the old abbey of Caldwell, the leper-house of St. Leonard, the gateway of St. John, and the manor-house in St. Cuthbert's.

Bedford, in the days to which we are now looking back, was rigidly exclusive. Foreigners, by which were meant natives of English towns elsewhere, were not admitted to the merchant-guild; no townsman was permitted to let his house to a foreigner without the consent of the mayor; and no inn-holder or victualler could receive a stranger into his house for more than eight days and nights without reporting him to the mayor. After ten o'clock at night till

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five next morning the traffic over the bridge was stopped. Indeed, personal safety almost necessitated the keeping within doors after nightfall; for the streets were badly paved where paved at all; and judging by an ordinance of 1656, they were even worse lighted than paved. In these days of gas and the electric light there is a delightful old-world simplicity about a minute to be found in the Act-Book of the Corporation, under date October 10, 1656. By that minute it was "Ordayned: That on St. Luke's Day next comyng until Candlemas following, and soe yearlie for ever, lights shall be sett forth in the High Streete of this town all along on both sides of the River of Ouze from the house called the Peacock in St. Peter's parish to the Bridge in St. John's parish on the way to Ampthill. And they shall be sett up at the Shutting in of the Evening and be continued until eight o'clock following. Each occupier of Shops and other Edifices next the Streete shall each of them according to the turne of the side set out a Candlelight of the bigness at least of Sixteen in the pound." One night, one side of the street was to be lit up, and the next, the opposite; the Bridge-house and all public-houses to be always lit. Further, "the Bedell of Beggars, for the time being, shall upon St. Luke's day next comyng, and Every Evening after at the Shutting in of the Evening, make public call in the Streete for setting forth of lights; and shall give notice to the Mayor next day of defaulters."

Almost from the time of his removal from Elstow to Bedford, Bunyan's life seems to have been darkened

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by sorrow. His own health appeared to be seriously failing. He says: "I was somewhat inclining to a consumption, wherewith about the Spring, I was suddenly and violently seized with much weakness in my outward man, insomuch that I thought I could not live." Elsewhere also he says: "I was at another time very ill and weak, all that time also the Tempter did beset me strongly, for I find he is much for assaulting the Soul when it begins to approach towards the grave, then is his opportunity." This sickness did not, however, prove so serious as he feared. It was simply weakness of body, resulting from intense overstrain of mind and heart; and subsequently he tells us, "My sickness did presently vanish, and I walked comfortably in my work for God again." But though these fears vanished, a dark shadow came over his home and clouded his heart and life. He was spared, but the wife of his youth was taken. It adds to the pathos of the first years of his Bedford life, to remember that they were spent under the shadow of this great bereavement, and that, while he was still battling with inward conflict, he had at the same time to be both father and mother to his poor blind child and to the other three children whom his wife had, in dying, left to his care.

It was shortly after Bunyan came to reside in the town of Bedford that his pastor and friend John Gifford was called away by death. In the minute-book of the Common Council there is the following entry under date September 19, 1655: "Whereas the Rectorie and Hospitall of St. John Baptist in this Town the patronage whereof belongs to y^e Corporacon) is

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fallen void by the death of Mr. John Gifford : It is agreed that Mr. Hayes, of Papworth, bee presented thereto, and Mr. Maior is hereby authorised to set the Town Seale to an Instrument to that purpose." To the Church itself, however, this appointment was unwelcome, and was resisted. A minute of October 15 states that "certaine persons, members of the Corporation and others, to weaken the presentation, submitted to His Highness that it was surreptitiously and suddenly contrived and carryed on." This allegation the friends of Mr. Hayes denied, whereupon Cromwell determined to hear both sides for himself. The minute goes on to say : "And whereas also on Wednesday next His Highness hath appointed to heare the difference of allegation of both parties, this Councell doe agree that appearance bee made in defence of the said Act and Petition, And that Mr. John Baxter and two Aldermen or other members of the Corporation appear as Agents for y^e Corporation." The appeal resulted as the Church desired, Cromwell deciding that the appointment should be in favour of John Burton. In the carefully kept registers of ecclesiastical appointments made during the Commonwealth—records corresponding to the Episcopal registers of the previous and subsequent periods—there is the following entry, dated Whitehall, the 16th day of January, 1655-6 : "Know all men by these presents that whereas the Mastership and Rectory of the Hospitall of St. John Baptist in y^e Towne of Bedford is and stands sequestered from Mr. Theodore Crowley, late Rector thereof ; and Mr. John Burton is by His Highness, Oliver, Lord Protector of England,

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&c., under his seal manuell, nominated thereunto, the Commissioners for approbation of Publique Preachers having received a Testimony of the holy and good conversation of the said John Burton, and finding him to be a person qualified as in and by the Ordinance for such approbation is required, Doe by these presents ratifie, confirm, and allow the said John Burton to be and continue in the Hospitall aforesaid as Publique Preacher there.”*

John Burton, John Bunyan's second pastor, who thus came in as the successor of Gifford, was a young man who, under the strain of public life, proved to be of delicate health and his ministry of brief duration. He appears to have been greatly beloved by the people of his charge. In their Church records he is spoken of with much affection, and his repeated prostrations by illness were the subject of devout concern at their meetings for prayer. These records of the Church began to be kept about four months after his appointment, that is, in May 1656, and with only such breaks as days of persecution necessitated have been continued down to our own times. Since they have not before been published we may give them here so far as they illustrate the Christian life of the seventeenth century and the mode of Church fellowship adopted by Bunyan and the brethren and sisters who consorted with him.

With a reference to the sister who was Gifford's first convert, the minutes of the Acts of the Church commence somewhat abruptly thus :

“ At the meeting of the congregation at Bedford the

* Lambeth MSS.—Augmentations, vol. 996, fol. 469.

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24th of the second mon : 1656, Sister Cooper's desire of joyning with the congregation was considered, and bro : Burton, bro : Spensely, and bro : Harrington were appointed to go to her, for the further satisfaction of the Church.

“ 26th of the 4th moneth, John Wilson's desire of joyning with the congregation was mentioned, and it was agreed that he should give an account of the worke of grace in his soul, next meeting.*

“ 28th of the 6th moneth. It is agreed that a speedy course be taken either by publick petition or some private way to gather a sune of money for the release of our Sister Deane. It is agreed also that next fourth day of the weeke come fortnight be set apart to seeke God by prayer.

“ 1st day of the 8th moneth. It was agreed that two brethren should be made choyce of every monethly meeting to go abroad to visit our brethren and sisters ; and to certify us how they doe body and soule ; and to stirre them up to come (especially at our monethly meetings) to us to Bedford ; and to let them know if they come not, the Church will expect an account of the reason of their absence. It was desired that bro : Burton would spend one houre in the weeke, in exhorting the prisoners in the County Goale, and he consented to enter upon that worke the next weeke following.

“ 1657, 6th day of the 1st moneth. It was agreed

* John Wilson was afterwards the first minister of the Nonconformist Church at Hitchin, and one of the editors of the first collected edition of Bunyan's works, published in 1692.

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that the 13th day of the next moneth be set apart to seek God about the affaires of the Church; the affaires of the Nation and the worke of God in y^e world.

“At the Meeting of the Church the 30th of the 2nd moneth. Many of the Friends were absent upon a publick occasion so that nothing was then acted.

“28th of the 3rd moneth. It was agreed that bro: John Crane be admitted a member of this Congregation upon his profession that he joyneth with us, as we are in union with Christ though differing in judgement about some outward things. Bro: Bunyan, bro: Childe and bro: John Fenn were appointed to go to friend Stratton, junr., of Stoughton.

“It is agreed that next 2nd day of the week come seven-night be set apart to praise God for his goodness in delivering us out of our late troubles, and to seeke God for direction in discoursing with any of our dissenting friends.”

The last three entries point to some grave cause of anxiety, of more than merely local concern, which was agitating the Bedford Church in the spring and summer of 1657. We find them anxious unto prayer “about the affaires of the nation;” friends among them are absent from a church-gathering “upon a publick occasion;” and finally, when the strain is over, they set apart a day to praise God for delivering them out of their “late troubles,” and to seek for direction in discoursing with their “dissenting friends,” who are evidently not in thankful mood with the rest of their brethren.

The occasion was memorable enough both for them

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and for the nation. About midnight of January 8th a determined attempt had been made, by setting fire to Whitehall Palace, to take away Cromwell's life. Fortunately, it failed. Parliament appointed a day of thanksgiving for the Protector's deliverance, and waited on him in a body to congratulate him upon his escape. But that escape had been narrow, and some began seriously to consider whether the nation would not be more settled if Oliver were to become king, with succession of his heirs male to the crown. A Humble Address and Remonstrance was read in the House of Commons, asking the Protector to concur with Parliament in a total recasting of the existing constitution. The first article after the preamble ran thus: "That your Highness will be pleased to assume the name, style, title, dignity, and office of King of England, Scotland, and Ireland." The rest of the address was in accordance with this first clause. There was to be an end of arbitrary power, and once more government under a limited monarchy. On the 25th of March, by a majority of 123 to 62, or, as nearly as possible, two to one, the kingship clause was carried, in a somewhat amended form, and the title, Address and Remonstrance changed into that of Petition and Advice.

The rumour of this gradually got abroad in the country, creating great division of opinion. There was a strong party in Bedfordshire adverse to the proposed change. William Dell of Yelden, with John Donne of Pertenhall, and others, drew up a document, a copy of which, dated April 14, 1657, is

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among the broadsides in the King's Library,* and is entitled "The Humble and Serious Testimony of many hundreds of godly and well-affected people in the county of Bedford and parts adjacent, constant adherers to the cause of God and the Nation." This document states that the object of the late war was to "recover our civill and religious rights and liberties," and that this good cause "is now in danger of being brought into a particular Quarrell between Person and Person, Family and Family touching the administration of Government in these Nations." The subscribers state they have neither heart nor hand in these late "Declinings from the cause of Christ nor in the change of Government from a Commonwealth." They think that the proposed change will "lay the foundation for a new, most bloody and desolating war;" they apprehend "the forme of a Commonwealth as opposed to Monarchy to be more expedient, yea, necessary, seeing the interest of no single person will probably be able long to stand against the interest and Family of the Stuarts, which the Commonwealth wisely managed may better doe. Wherefore we declare that we still remaine faithfull to the first good cause."

In Bedford, as in the army, and, indeed, in the Protector's own council, there were "contrariants" who inclined more to the left, in the direction of a real republic, than to the right, in the direction of monarchy. On April 3, Cromwell, in effect, though not in form, refused the offer of kingship; on the 4th, Parliament by a majority of seventy-eight to

* British Museum, 190, g. 12, 223.

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sixty-five, again pressed upon him their "Petition and Advice." The matter was kept pending for a whole month, but on May 8, Cromwell said positively enough, "I cannot undertake this Government with the title of King: and that is mine Answer to this great and weighty business." A new Protectoral Constitution was thereupon settled, and amidst public rejoicings his Highness was solemnly installed in his second Protectorate. This took place in Westminster Hall on Friday, June 26, and the following Sunday the Church at Bedford set apart a day of praise to God for His goodness in delivering them out of their late troubles, and to ask for direction in dealing with their "dissenting friends," that is, those members of the Church who would have nothing to do with the "Humble and Serious Testimony" against Oliver's kingship.

There is no evidence to show what was Bunyan's feeling as to the Lord Protector's assumption of the kingship of the nation. The Testimony itself has been preserved on a printed broadside, but the original document, with the names appended to it, is not in existence; we cannot say, therefore, whether his name was among them or not. In 1657, when it was presented, he was already earnestly engaged in that exercise of preaching which was to be to life's end his great life-work. On a comparison of dates it appears that about two years after he joined the Church, that is in 1655, he was asked by the brethren to speak a word of exhortation in their gatherings. Like all true souls, he was modest in his self-estimate, and this request of theirs, he says, did much "dash

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and abash" his spirit. Nevertheless he rose to the call, and though with much weakness and infirmity, "did discover his gift among them." Those fortunate first listeners felt at once that no common seer had risen up among them. "They did solemnly protest, as in the sight of the great God, that they were both affected and comforted, and gave thanks to the Father of Mercies for the grace bestowed on me." Then he began to go out with the brethren, who went into the country to teach, and would sometimes add a word to what had been said by them. These added words were words of power, and more and more the call of God became plain to himself and to others. So plain that, on the earnest desire of the Church, and after some solemn prayer to the Lord, with fasting, he was more particularly called forth and appointed to a more ordinary and public preaching of the Word. His very success surprised and humbled him. "Though of myself of all the Saints the most unworthy, yet I but with great fear and trembling at the sight of my own weakness did set forth upon the work and did according to my gift and the proportion of my Faith preach that blessed Gospel that God had showed me." The work grew marvellously. When the country understood that he, the tinker, had turned preacher, "they came to hear the word by hundreds, and that from all parts, though upon sundry and divers accounts."

He had been preaching about a year when he became entangled in a controversy with the Quakers, which led to his first appearance as an author.

Some of their number had found their way into

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the town of Bedford, and there delivered their testimony on the inward light in terms which, to Bunyan and other members of the Church, seemed to come perilously near to a disparagement of the written word. From casual glimpses in the writings both of Edward Burrough and of Bunyan himself, we find controversies going on in public between the latter and some of the Friends. Danson speaks of a conflict between Bunyan and some Quakers at the market cross in Bedford; Burrough tells us of certain words spoken by Bunyan on April 12 at Patnam [Pavenham]; of what John Burton and John Bunyan said in Paul's Steeple-house in Bedford town on May 23, 1656; and of what John Bunion and one Fenn and John Child laid down on the 23rd of the 8th month, 1656. On one of these occasions a zealous Quaker sister took part in the discussions, for Bunyan says to Burrough: "I shall tell you of your sister, Anne Blackley, who did bid me in the audience of many to throw away the Scriptures; to which I answered, No! for then the devil would be too hard for me." Burrough complains farther "that John Bunion said the 30th of the 10th month that the Spirit of Christ doth nothing (mark!) within man as to justification—O horrid blindness! not to be paralleled."

Into this controversy Bunyan entered with so much interest that, as we have hinted already, it led to his first venture in the way of authorship. Evidently thrown off at a heat, and in the midst of the steeple-house disputations of that same year, there appeared a little volume in duodecimo of about two hundred pages, entitled "Some Gospel Truths

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Opened, by that unworthy servant of Christ, John Bunyan of Bedford, by the Grace of God, preacher of the Gospel of his dear Son." Possibly there was no bookseller in Bedford then ; or he may, for reasons of friendship, have resorted to one whose acquaintance he made in his soldiering days ; for the imprint runs thus : "London, printed for J. W., and are to be sold by Mathias Cowley, Bookseller in Newport Pagnell, 1656." There was an epistle prefatory by John Burton, in which he says of Bunyan : "This man is not chosen out of an earthly but out of the heavenly university, the Church of Christ. . . . He hath through grace taken these three heavenly degrees, to wit, union with Christ, the anointing of the Spirit, and experiences of the temptations of Satan, which do more fit a man for that mighty work of preaching the Gospel than all university learning and degrees that can be had." He adds that he himself has had "experience with many others of this man's soundnesse in the faith, of his godly conversation and his ability to preach the Gospel."

The drift of the book was a protest against what he thought the dangerous mysticism of Quaker teachings. There was really an historic Christ, Son of Mary and Son of God, as well as a spiritual Christ revealed in the soul. He will plant his feet firmly on the facts of revelation, and has too much common sense to allow everything to be explained away into mere transcendentalism. Spiritual he is to his heart's core, but vainly mystical he will not be. This was his controversy with the Quakers. He will have no spiritualising away into thin air of the facts of our

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Lord's life. Here Jesus lived in a body like our own, and here he literally died. He was no mere shadow, but "the very substance of all things that did in any way type out Christ." He was truly born into the world, truly died, and was buried, and in true and real sense, and not in any merely spiritual signification ascended into heaven. "I was told to my face," says he, "that I preached up an idol because I said that the Son of Mary was in heaven with the same body that was crucified on the Cross." And His second coming will be as literal as His first. "The day shall burn as an oven, and the evil shall be as stubble. Ah, friends, put a red hot oven and stubble together and what work there will be!" He takes his farewell, warning his readers against those who are for a Christ within, a cross within, a resurrection and intercession within, and not for a Christ without, a resurrection of Christ without, an intercession of Christ without. He will have them receive a Son of Man and Son of God in truth, and they will do more work for God in one hour than mere visionaries can do in a lifetime.

This little book of Bunyan's fell into the hands of Edward Burrough, a young man of three-and-twenty, a fervent, earnest soul among the Quakers, who, six years later, sealed his testimony with his life in the gaol at Newgate. There quickly appeared a reply entitled, "The True Faith of the Gospel of Peace, contended for in the spirit of meekness . . . against the secret opposition of John Bunyan, a professed minister in Bedfordshire." One wishes that these two good men could have had a little free and

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friendly talk face to face. There would probably have been better understanding and fewer hard words, for they were really not so far apart as they thought. Bunyan believed in the inward light, and Burrough surely accepted an objective Christ. But failing to see each other's exact point of view, Burrough thunders at Bunyan, and Bunyan swiftly returns the shot. Within a few weeks there appears from the pen of the latter "A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened," in which he tells Friend Burrough that he is very censorious, and utters many words without knowledge.

But though Bunyan's first appearance as an author was in the region of controversy, it was not along this line his best work was to be done. He was to win the homage of men's hearts by holding up those central verities on which Christians are mainly agreed, and by unfolding the fairer aspects of that life from God which makes them one. Preaching became the passion, as it had become the work, of his life. He gave himself wholly to it, in the sense that he was a whole man in it. At a later time, as he lay a prisoner in Bedford Gaol, he went back in thought over the five years between 1655 and 1660, when he was at large, and laid bare for us the heart-experiences to which he was no stranger as he pleaded with men. More than most, he compassed the range, ascended the heights, and sounded the depths of the preacher's life. Sometimes, he says, he would start with clearness, evidence, and liberty of speech, and before long become so straitened before the people that it seemed to him as if his "head had been in a

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bag all the time of the exercise." Sometimes he would be seized with a strange faintness and strengthlessness of body on his way to the place of meeting, and afterwards be "tempted to pride and liftings up of heart" at his hold over the people. With the instinct of a real prophet of God, he wished to see the truth, not through other men's eyes, but through his own. He could not use other men's lines, finding "by experience that what was taught him by the Word and Spirit of Christ could be spoken to, maintained, and stood to by the soundest and best established conscience." No preacher of doubts was he, but of assured verities. He felt, he says, "as if an Angel were at his back;" that which he spoke lay with such power and heavenly evidence upon his soul that he could "not be contented with saying I believe and am sure; methought I was more than sure (if it be lawful so to express myself) that those things which then I asserted were true."

With the true preacher's passionate longing, he strove to get firm grip of the souls of his hearers. "In my preaching I have really been in pain, I have, as it were, travailed to bring forth Children to God." If his work were fruitless it mattered little who praised, or if it were fruitful, who condemned. He often noticed that "when he had a work to do for God in a place, there was a great going of God upon his spirit, leading him to desire to go there." He also observed that such and such souls in particular were strongly set upon his heart, and these very souls afterwards given him as the fruits of his ministry. It was not always his best preparation he

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found to be most effective. "A word cast in by the by hath done more execution in a Sermon than all that was spoken besides." Sometimes, when he thought he had done no good he did most, and at other times, when he thought he should catch men, he has fished for nothing. Occasionally he has been about to take up some smart and searching portion of the Word, when up starts the Tempter and asks him if he really is going to preach a Truth which so plainly condemns himself; but he thanks God, who helped him to put down these horrid suggestions, and to bow himself with all his might to condemn Sin and Transgression wherever found, even upon his own conscience. "Let me die, thought I, with the Philistines, rather than deal corruptly with the blessed Word of God."

When tempted to vanity over his success, "the Lord of his precious mercy hath so carried it towards me that for the most part I have had but small joy to give way to such a thing. For it hath been my every day's portion to be let into the evil of my own heart, and still made to see such a multitude of corruptions and infirmities therein that it hath caused hanging down of the head under all my Gifts and Attainments. I have felt this thorn in the Flesh the very God of mercy to me." He saw that, if he had gifts, but wanted saving grace, he was but as a tinkling cymbal. "This consideration was as a maul on the head of Pride and desire of vain glory. What, thought I, shall I be proud because I am a sounding brass? Is it so much to be a Fiddle?" Love will never die, but gifts will cease

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and vanish ; gifts are not our own, but the Church's, and to be accounted for in stewardship. Gifts, indeed, are desirable, but yet great grace and small gifts are better than great gifts and no grace. At sight of this the snare was broken and he escaped. The enemy not being able to overthrow him by inward temptations set about outward opposition. Bunyan noticed, and could "instance particulars" to show, that "where the Lord was most at work Satan was busiest, hath there begun to roar in the hearts, and by the mouths of his servants; where the world has raged most there souls have been most awakened."

In his teachings he proceeds to tell us that he cared not to meddle with things that were controverted and in dispute amongst the saints, especially things of the lowest nature. His work, he felt, lay in another channel, to contend with great earnestness for the word of faith and remission of sins by the death and sufferings of Jesus; to carry an awakening word; and to that, therefore, did he stick and adhere. He took special notice that the Lord led him to begin where His word begins with the sinner—at the condemnation of the law, because of sin. This part of his work he "fulfilled with great sense," for in those earlier days the terrors lay heavy on his own conscience. He preached what he felt, what he "smartingly did feel." He seemed to go in chains to preach to them in chains, and carried that fire in his own conscience that he persuaded them to beware of.

It was at this time in his life-experience, when as

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yet love had not cast out fear, that he sent forth his work on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, entitled "Sighs from Hell." Taking the parable as descriptive of the literal facts of the unseen world, Bunyan gives play to a vivid but weird imagination. "Consider," says he, "how terrible it will be to have all the ten commandments condemn thee one after another, more terrible than to have ten of the biggest pieces of ordnance in England to be discharged against thy body, thunder, thunder, one after another!" While the drift of the book is serious, there are such strokes of the writer's special humour as these: The careless man lies like the smith's dog at the foot of the anvil, though the fire-sparks flee in his face. Some men despise the Lazaruses of our Lord Jesus Christ because they are not gentlemen, because they cannot with Pontius Pilate speak Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. The rich man remembers how he slighted the Scriptures: "The Scriptures, thought I, what are they? A dead letter, a little ink and paper of three or four shillings price! Alas! what is the Scripture? Give me a ballad, a newsbook, 'George on horse-back' or 'Bevis of Southamton;' give me some book that teaches curious arts, that tells of old fables." Speaking of Christ's condescension he says, "He became poorer than they that go with flail and rake." In Him death has no fear for us. "Death can do thee no harm. It is only a passage out of a prison into a palace, out of a sea of troubles into a haven of rest, out of a crowd of enemies to an innumerable company of true, loving, and faithful

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friends." There is infinite comfort for us in Christ. "I tell thee, friend, there are some promises that the Lord hath helped me to lay hold of Jesus Christ through and by, that I would not have out of the Bible for as much gold and silver as can lie between York and London piled up to the stars."

There is prefixed to this book a lengthy address to the reader, signed with the initials "J. G.," which are probably those of John Gibbs, the minister of Newport Pagnel, certainly not of John Gifford, as Mr. Offor takes for granted, for, as we now know, Gifford had been dead three years when the book appeared. In this address the writer says that Bunyan, because of his fidelity, had been sorely shot at by the archers. He himself tells us the same thing. Slanders were heaped upon him, the grossest immoralities were charged against him, it was rumoured that he was a wizard, a Jesuit, a highwayman, and the like. "What shall I say," asks he, "to those who have bespattered me? Shall I threaten them? Shall I chide them? Shall I flatter them? Shall I entreat them to hold their tongues? No, not I. It belongs to my Christian profession to be vilified, slandered, reproached, and reviled. I rejoice in reproaches for Christ's sake."

Known as a tinker, his orders and his right to preach were always of course being questioned. "When I went first to preach the word abroad, the doctors and priests of the country did open wide against me." Yet if ever man were God-ordained this was he. He had all the signs of apostleship. The inward call from above, a "secret pricking forward

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to the work" in his own soul, the solemn setting apart of the Church and the response of the souls to whom he spoke; "they would bless God for me, and count me God's instrument that showed to them the way of salvation." Having this three-fold seal from on high, he was comparatively indifferent to the challenge of the world around him. Once, at least, even in Commonwealth days, the arm of the law was invoked against what was regarded as this irregular ministry of his. In the month of March 1658, we find the Church at Bedford praying "for counsaile what to doe with respect to the indictment against brother Bunyan at the Assizes for preaching at Eaton." As we hear nothing more of this, probably nothing more came of it. Indeed, he seems about this time to have preached in several of the national church buildings without molestation. There is a tradition that he did so in the old and now disused parish church of Ridgmount. The author of the little sketch of his life published in 1700 also tells us that he, "being to preach in a country village in Cambridgeshire"—probably Melbourn—"and the people being gathered together in the churchyard, a Cambridge scholar, and none of the soberest of them neither, enquired what was the meaning of that concourse of people (it being upon a weekday), and being told that one Bunyan, a tinker, was to preach there, he gave a boy twopence to hold his horse, saying, 'He was resolved to hear the tinker prate,' and so he went into the church to hear him." The writer goes on to say that he had this story from the man himself, who out of that service also became a

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preacher of the truth—possibly referring to William Bedford, the founder in after days of Congregationalism in Royston. To these years before the Restoration belongs also the story of Bunyan's encounter on the road near Cambridge with the university man, who asked him how he, not having the original Scriptures, dared to preach. To this he gave answer by asking this scholar, in turn, if he himself had the originals, the actual copies written by prophets and apostles. No, but he had what he knew to be true copies of the originals. "And I," said Bunyan, "believe the English Bible to be a true copy also," upon which the university man went his way.

In addition to this small passage of arms with the gownsman, there was a yet more formal encounter between the tinker and the university librarian. One Daniel Angier, of Toft, in Cambridgeshire, occasionally invited Bunyan to come over and preach in his barn. In the month of May 1659, Bunyan was holding a service in Angier's barn, when towards the end of the sermon in walked Thomas Smith, of Cambridge, who was at once rector of Gawcat, professor of Arabic, reader in rhetoric, lecturer at Christ's College, and keeper of the university library. Bunyan was preaching from 1 Tim. iv. 16, and in the course of his sermon told his audience that he knew most of them to be unbelievers. At the close of the service, and in the midst of some confusion, Smith went up to Bunyan and asked him what right he had to say that of men half of whose faces he had never seen before. St. Paul called the people to whom he

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wrote saints and beloved of God, and all the Protestant preachers beyond seas addressed their auditors as *Fideles*; what right had he, then, to call a company of baptized people unbelievers? Clearly he was uncharitable, and being uncharitable was unfit to preach. To all this Bunyan replied that when Christ preached from a ship to his hearers on the shore, He taught that there were four kinds of ground into which the good seed of the sower fell, and that only one of the four brought forth fruit. "Now," says Bunyan, "your position is that he that in effect condemneth the greater part of his hearers hath no charity, and is therefore not fit to preach the gospel. But here the Lord Jesus did so; then your conclusion is the Lord Jesus wanted charity, and was therefore not fit to preach the gospel."* Bunyan having thus defended himself, his friend, Daniel Angier, also rose up to defend him and to rebuke his assailant; but Smith denied the layman's right to preach, and asked Bunyan what he had to say to the apostle's question: "How shall they preach except they be sent?" To this, of course, Bunyan replied that the Church at Bedford had sent him, to which, equally of course, Smith rejoined that the Church at Bedford, being only lay people, could not give the tinker that which they had not themselves. So ended the parley in the barn.

The learned professor was not satisfied, however, with this encounter with the unlearned tinker, and in the course of a few weeks he published "A Letter to Mr. E. of Taft, four miles from Cambridge."

* Charles Doe's account, Folio of 1692

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Since Mr. E. would not hear him in the barn, nor suffer his daughters to stay, he will now write part of what he meant to say then. Hoping he "will not believe him whom his friends generally call the tinker upon his bare word, I shall," he says, "follow that method which the tinker commanded me, shewing first his false doctrine, and then prove 'tis a dangerous sin in him to preach (as he did so publickly), and in the people to hear him." Starting by saying that "if any man among you (though he be a wandering preaching tinker, for you must give me leave to call him so till I know what other name he hath) seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain." He goes over again the question of a layman's right to preach, and concludes that such preaching is a piece of presumption. "All this your tinker hath been guilty of and much more, for he hath not only intruded into the pulpits in these parts, and caused the people of your town to hate their lawful minister [Mr. John Ellis, sen.], but (as he told me) encouraged them to proceed so far as to cudgel him and break open the church doors by violence." We may reasonably suppose that there is some misunderstanding here, or that this professor of rhetoric was drawing upon a rhetorical imagination. With the usual arguments, often advanced and as often refuted, Smith having tried to prove his case, thus concludes: "And now, sir, let me beseech you for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for the Church's sake, for your reputation's sake, for your children's sake, for your country's sake, for your own immortal soul's sake to consider

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these things sadly and seriously, not to think a tinker more infallible than the pure Spouse of Christ, and to foresee what will be the sad consequences both to the souls, and bodies, and estates of you and your children in following such strangers." *

It does not appear that Bunyan made any reply to this letter from Thomas Smith. A reply was, however, made on his behalf by Henry Denne,† himself a Cambridge man, and an old friend of the university librarian. Appealing to Smith, he says :

"You seem to be angry with the tinker because he strives to mend souls as well as kettles and pans. The main drift of your letter is to prove that none may preach except they be sent. Sir, I think him unworthy the name of a tinker that affirms that any one is sufficient to preach the gospel without sending. By your confession the tinker thinks otherwise, and doth not deny what you labour to prove, and so you contend with a shadow. He proves his mission and commission from the Church at Bedford, you should also have proved that Mr. Thomas Smith hath a better commission from some other Church than the tinker either hath or can have from the Church at Bedford. You must give me leave to propound something for your consideration : Some shipwrackt men, swimming to an island, find there many inhabitants, to whom they preach; the heathen hearing

* "The Quaker Disarmed. With a Letter in Defence of the Ministry and against Lay-Preachers. London : Printed by J. C., and are sold neer the Little North-Door of St. Paul's Church, 1659."

† "The Quaker no Papist." London : Francis Smith, 1659.

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are converted, and walk together in love, praising the Lord: whether the preaching of these shipwreckt men were a sin? Secondly, whether it be not lawful for this congregation to chuse to themselves pastors, governours, teachers, &c.? Thirdly, whether this congregation may not find some fitting men full of faith and the Holy Ghost to preach to other unbelieving heathen?"

Besides Henry Denne another university man not only thought that Bunyan had a right to preach, but set him up in the pulpit of his own church to do so. This was William Dell, the rector of Yelden, who was also master of Gonville and Caius. When in 1660 the tide of the Commonwealth had turned and the King come back, some of Dell's Royalist parishioners sent up a petition to the House of Lords against him. It is dated June 20, 1660, and endorsed as dismissed on July 25. Among other complaints brought against him it is alleged that he had "declared in the public congregation that he had rather hear a plain countryman speak in the church that came from the plough than the best orthodox minister that was in the country. Upon Christmas Day last one Bunyon, of Bedford, a tinker, was countenanced and suffered to speak in his pulpit to the congregation, and no orthodox minister did officiate in the church that day."* Let us hope that these discontented parishioners of Yelden whose petition was dismissed, recovered in time from the indignity of having had to listen to a tinker in their parish church, especially considering how memorable

* House of Lords MSS. June 20, 1660.

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a tinker he became; and let us thank them for giving us this glimpse of the friendship existing between two men so interesting to us as John Bunyan and William Dell.

It was in the year in which he preached in Yelden church, the last before his imprisonment, that Bunyan made his fourth appearance as an author. The book was entitled "The Doctrine of the Law and Grace unfolded." The well-known bookseller, Thomason, who made the collection of books and pamphlets now in the King's Library, marked this work as coming out in May 1659. It was the outcome of Bunyan's experience and of his preaching in the second stage of his life as a teacher, of which he says that, after he had gone forth, for the space of two years, crying out against men's sins, the Lord came in upon his soul with some staid peace and comfort through Christ: "Wherefore now I altered in my preaching (for still I preached what I saw and felt); now, therefore, I did much labour to hold forth Jesus Christ in all His Offices, Relations, and Benefits unto the World." This is really the substance of this work of his on Law and Grace, the last of his books before his prison life. It is marked by firm grasp of faith and a strong, clear view of the reality of Christ's person and work as the one Priest and Mediator for a sinful world. There are in it, as in some other of his writings, telling references to his own experience, showing how he had himself gone through all the struggles of doubt right up to the daylight of faith, in which, as he says, "I saw through grace that it was the blood shed on Mount

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Calvary that did save and redeem sinners as clearly and as really with the eyes of my soul as ever methought I had seen a penny loaf bought with a penny." Laden with sin he had found that "when tears would not do, prayers would not do, repenting and all other things would not reach my heart, then the blood let out with the spear hath in a very blessed manner delivered me." And while he thus speaks of Christ with boldness, he still speaks of himself with that deep humility which marked him to the end of his life. Almost with pathos he pleads for his readers' prayers. "Christians," says he in the epistle which was prefixed as a foreword, "pray for me to our God, with much earnestness, fervency, and frequently, in all your knockings at our Father's door, because I do very much stand in need thereof, for my work is great, my heart is vile, the devil lieth at watch, the world would fain be saying, Aha, aha, thus would we have it! and of myself, keep myself I cannot, trust myself I dare not; if God do not help me I am sure it will not be long before my heart deceive, and the world have their advantage of me."

It may be well now to close the story of the first five years of Bunyan's life in Bedford by returning to the Records of the Church in 1657, when we left the brethren concerned about Cromwell's Kingship, and continuing them to 1660, when the Restoration brought back a king of quite other sort to the Lord Protector.

"1657. At a meeting of the Church the 27th of y^e 6th moneth: our bro: John Whiteman was

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received into full communion with this congregation. Whereas there hath heretofore bene time spent in seeking God to direct us in the choyce of officers necessary for the Congregation, according to the order of the Gospell; and whereas heretofore there were nominated, and appointed for tryall our bro : Spensely, bro : Bunyan, bro : Coventon, and bro : Robert Wallis; to exercise the office of deacons; and bro : Bunyan being taken off by the preaching of the Gospell : We are agreed : That bro : Bunyan being otherwise imployed, our other three brethren before-named be continued : and upon farther debate and good consideration, have also made free choyce of our bro : John ffenne to be joyned with them : and that at the next meeting God be sought to by the Church upon his behalfe, that he with the other may be directed in their worke.

“ It is agreed that next 5th day of the week be set apart to joyne in prayer with the rest of our brethren in y^e three nations; according to the motion made by bro : Jesse and others with him.

“ 25th of the 12th moneth : It is agreed that the 3rd day of the next moneth be set apart to seeke God in the behalf of our bro : Wheeler who hath bene long ill in body, whereby his ministry hath bene hindered, and also about y^e Church affaires, and the affaires of the Nation, and for our bro : Whitbread, who hath been long ill : and also for counsaile what to doe with respect to the indictment against bro : Bunyan at y^e Assizes for preaching at Eaton.

“ It was ordered according to our agreement that our bro : Bunyan be prepared to speake a word to

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us at the next Church meeting and that our bro : Whiteman faile not to speake to him of it.

“ At a meeting of the Church the latter part of the 6th moneth. Whereas the Lord hath taken to himself our teacher bro : Burton, we are agreed to set apart the 17th of the next moneth to seek to the Lord for direction in our advising and considering of a Pastor or Teacher suitable for us.

“ We desire our bro : Harrington, bro : Coventon, bro : John ffenne to take care to informe themselves of a convenient place for our meeting so soone as they can (we being deprived of our former place) and reporte it to y^e Church.”

* . . . * . . . * . . . *

Thus dark and gloomy was the outlook for the Church at Bedford in the autumn days of 1660. Their minister was taken away from them by death, and their church building by the Restoration of King Charles. They must now seek another pastor and another place of meeting. Their hearts were sore and sorrowful. They would have been sorer still, and yet more sorrowful, could these brethren have seen beforehand that long wilderness march through twelve years of persecution which lay between the farewell to St. John's and the then distant day when the Church should once more have a meeting place of its own.

VII

HARLINGTON HOUSE AND THE CHAPEL OF HERNE

THE removal of Cromwell by death was the removal of the one strong man alone capable of controlling the conflicting forces of the Commonwealth. Richard Cromwell succeeded to the position of Lord Protector, but not to the inheritance of his father's genius, and in eight months had vanished into private life again, glad, in his easygoing way, to be rid of the trouble of ruling a nation he was not strong enough to govern.

It was not long before a great change came over the feeling of the nation. Men grew weary of the perpetual see-saw going on between the Army and the Parliament. The very Oliverians were becoming Royalist in their sympathies, and men of diversified opinion were beginning to think that it might be best after all to bring back the king and come to honourable terms if they could.

The king entered London on May 29, and as early as the month of June Parliament proceeded to deal with the regicides who had put his father to

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death. There were eleven of these for whom there was to be no mercy—those who had sat in judgment on the late king, and who had not delivered themselves up within the fourteen days allowed by the king's proclamation. One of the eleven was a Bedfordshire man, Colonel John Okey of Brogborough.

When the question of the regicides had been dealt with in Parliament, and also the subject of Supply and Revenue, there came the more vast and momentous question of the Church. The great body of the members of the Convention Parliament of 1660, though Royalist in sympathy were Presbyterian in ecclesiastical opinion, and they had committed the great blunder of letting the king come back without imposing upon him any conditions whatever. At first the intention was to negotiate with him at the Hague on the basis of the conditions offered to his father in the Treaty of Newport, in 1648, by which the return of prelacy would have been prevented and a Presbyterian Church Establishment made permanent. While he was still in Holland, Charles might probably have consented to this, but once he was in England the tide of popular feeling swept on in full stream, and it was then too late. There was nothing left but the king's own voluntary declaration, at Breda, promising liberty to tender consciences, and giving assurance that no man should be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion in matters of religion which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom. This, in the lips of a king like Charles II., might mean much or little according to circumstances, and there was one man with the king

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who had shared his exile and had great ascendancy over him, who had resolved that it should mean very little indeed, and certainly should not be permitted to stand in the way of the restoration of Episcopacy along with the restoration of the monarchy. This was Hyde, afterwards Lord Clarendon. Whether Charles knew his own mind or not, this man knew his, and never for a moment did he waver or by so much as a hair's breadth swerve from the policy of reviving the Episcopal Church as it existed in England before the Civil War began.

It is true there was much talk in the air about the comprehension of Presbyterians in the National Church, but on the part of the king and Hyde it was never intended to be more than talk ; there was even conference as to mutual concession, which from the first meant concession only on the side of the Presbyterians. Meantime, while meaningless talk went forward in one direction, decisive action was going forward in another. The old Episcopal clergy were coming forward by scores, claiming to be reinstated in the livings from which they had been sequestered; and before Parliament separated, on September 13, an Act was passed for the confirming and restoring of ministers, and providing that all "formerly ejected or sequestered ministers" still surviving should re-enter upon the possession of their benefices.

During the Parliamentary recess, which extended from September 13 to November 6, matters moved on apace. In Bedfordshire the county magistrates, in Quarter Sessions at Bedford, issued an order "for the publick reading of the Liturgy of the Church of

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England," and the following Sunday William Annand, the minister of Leighton Buzzard, preached, and afterwards published two sermons to conciliate the minds of his parishioners in favour of the "Book of Common Prayer."* These sermons he dedicates "To the Most Noble and Right Honourable Patriots, the Lords, Knights and Gentlemen, Justices of the Peace for the County of Bedford," the writer hoping they will give protection to this tender plant, not yet ten days old, since their order was the sole and only cause of its production. Five days later, on October 17, for the first time for many years, a new Bishop of Lincoln was elected. Thomas Winniffe, who was elected in 1642, had only held the position for a few months, when Episcopacy was overthrown by the Long Parliament, and he retired to Lambourne, in Essex, where he died in 1658, at the age of seventy-eight. The See of Lincoln had, therefore, been practically vacant for sixteen years, and actually vacant for two years more, when on October 17, 1660, Robert Sanderson was elected Bishop, and a week later consecrated. He was then an old man of seventy-three, but when some weeks afterwards he made public entry into the town of Bedford, which had almost forgotten what a bishop was like, it was more after the manner of a victorious general than of that of a bishop of the Church, the trained bands,

* "Panem Quotidianum: or a Short Discourse to prove the Legality, Decency, and Expediency of Set Forms of Prayer. By William Annand, M.A., Minister of Leighton Beaudezort, in Com., Bedford. London, 1661."

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as he passed, "giving a handsome volley," and then "a second salute with their muskets."*

This "handsome volley," followed by this "second salute" of musketry in Bedford streets, came strangely upon the ears of another bishop, who happened just then to have been recently lodged in Bedford gaol. John Bunyan had the honour of leading the van of those who suffered for conscience sake in the reign of the second Charles. Within little more than a month of the passing of the Order of the Justices, at Bedford, for the restoration of the Book of Common Prayer, that is, on November 12, 1660, he went by agreement to hold a religious service at the little hamlet of Lower Samsell, by Harlington, about thirteen miles from Bedford, to the south. This hamlet is a mile distant from Harlington Church, and is situated in the finely-wooded and undulating country which, beginning at Ampthill and stretching to the south for seven or eight miles, forms a contrast alike to the flat levels of the north of the county and the chalk downs of the south. The place where the service was to be held was a farmhouse, standing in the midst of a field thickly surrounded by elm-trees, except on the side looking towards the Barton Hills. Like all the old houses in the immediate neighbourhood that were in lonely situations, it was defended by a moat, the drawbridge of which could be lifted at night. The line of the foundations can still be traced, and the moat round them, and near by also still stands, though pollard and stunted now, the elm-tree, then growing on the

* "Mercurius Publicus."

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edge of the moat, and close to the house, when Bunyan was there. In the same field there was an old hawthorn-tree, beneath the shade of which Bunyan is said to have often stood and preached, and which was long known to the people of Samsell as Bunyan's thorn. But it was November when Bunyan paid that visit to the place with which we are now concerned, therefore the service was not this time to be under the hawthorn-tree, but in the house itself. When he reached the place of meeting, several of the friends who were to form his congregation were already gathered, but he felt at once that their usual glad reception was wanting. There were anxious looks and subdued whisperings, for they knew, what as yet he knew not, that the neighbouring magistrate, Francis Wingate, had issued a warrant against him, and that if he persisted in preaching he was to be arrested. The brother, at whose house the service was to be held, questioned the wisdom of proceeding. "As for my friend," says Bunyan generously, "I think he was more afraid for me than for himself." But Bunyan had no fear for himself, and when the people suggested the desirability of setting aside the service for that day, he promptly exclaimed, "No, by no means; I will not stir, neither will I have the meeting dismissed for this. Come, be of good cheer, let us not be daunted. Our cause is good, we need not be ashamed of it; to preach God's word is so good a work that we shall be well rewarded even if we suffer for it."

The time previously fixed for the service not being yet come, Bunyan passed out of the house, and paced

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the field by which the house was surrounded. It is still fringed with elm-trees, which were more numerous then, and beneath the leafless branches he passed to and fro, the burden of grave responsibility strong upon him. His thoughts, he tells us, were these: He had hitherto showed himself hearty and courageous in his preaching, and through God's mercy had been able to encourage others. Were he now, therefore, to turn and run, it would have a very ill look in the country round. What would the new converts think but that he was not as strong in deed as he was in word? Besides, if he ran before a warrant, others would run before mere words and threats. If God in His mercy had chosen him to go upon a forlorn hope in the country, had honoured him to be the first that should be opposed for the gospel, and he should fly, this would be a discouragement to the whole body that might follow after. Moreover, the outside world would certainly take occasion from such cowardliness to blaspheme the gospel, and to suspect worse of him and his profession than it deserved. Back, therefore, to the house he came, with mind more resolute than before. There was still time to flee if to flee he wished, for it was yet a full hour before the constable would arrive; but flee he would not, being resolved to see the utmost of what they could say or do unto him.

Meantime his friends were gathering. Along the path by the elm-trees from Harlington, and across the fields from Higher Samsell and Pulloxhill on one side, and from Westoning and Flitwick on the other, they came to the meeting, and Bunyan began. He

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began with prayer. Prayer was always a real thing to him, and probably never more real than then. Prayer being over and their Bibles opened, Bunyan was proceeding to speak to the people, when the constable, with Mr. Wingate's man, came in upon them, ordering him to stop and go with them. Bunyan turned to go, but as he did so he begged the people not to be discouraged, for it was a mercy to suffer upon so good an account. They might, he said, have been apprehended as thieves or murderers, or the like, but blessed be God it was not so ; they were only suffering as Christians for well-doing ; and, after all, it was better to be the persecuted than the persecutors. As Bunyan went on thus, the constable grew impatient, and would have him away ; and so they left the house.

Mr. Wingate not being at home that day, a friend of Bunyan's, possibly some neighbouring farmer of substance, engaged to bring him to the constable next morning, " otherwise," says he, " constable must have charged a watch with me or have secured me some other ways, my crime was so great."

The next day Bunyan and his friend went first to the constable, and then all three to the justice. Their path led through pleasant fields to the height on which stands Harlington church, from which a few minutes' walk brought them to Mr. Wingate's house. It is a quaint old building, with no pretension to size or stateliness, standing at the north-west angle of the four cross-roads. At that time it was entered, not on the south side as now, but through a heavy gateway at the front of the house, looking

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towards the old vicarage and the church. Portions of the building are of great antiquity. Till lately there was a plate on the oldest part bearing date 1396, at which time it was passed over by marriage from the Belverge family to a Wingate of the neighbouring village of Sharpenhoe. In the roof of one of the gables there is a curious hiding-place, which may have done good service to fugitive Royalists in the stormy days of civil war.

Francis Wingate, with whom we are now concerned, succeeded to the estate as a minor, and while a mere boy in his teens had married Lettice Pierce, the daughter of the vicar of Hitchin; so that when Bunyan appeared before him, though both men were born in the same year, and neither of them many years over thirty, Wingate had nine children in his house, ranging from Mistress Lettice, a young damsel of fifteen, down to the babe, recently christened Charles in honour of the king.

The examination of his memorable prisoner would take place in the hall, wider then than now, or in the great parlour, as it was called—an apartment with panelled walls and low ceiling, having oaken cross-beams centred by a carved rose boss. As soon as prisoner and magistrate stood face to face, Wingate asked the constable what the people were doing when he made the arrest, wishing, as Bunyan suggests, to throw out the suspicion that they had come together armed and for unlawful purposes. When, however, the constable quietly replied that there were only a few people met together to hear the preacher, and no sign of anything further, he knew

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not what to say. The truth was, he had acted in unnecessary haste and shown uncalled-for zeal. It cannot be said he had no alternative but to act as he did. No new law had been enacted and no overt act committed when he issued his warrant. He had to fall back on the old statute of 35 Elizabeth. It is true that the Parliament recently called to Westminster was Royalist in its sympathies, but it is equally true that it was largely Presbyterian. The elections of the following year, no doubt, changed all that; but in November 1660 it was still unchanged. The king had made from Breda a declaration, promising liberty and consideration for tender consciences, and there was still some hope of religious comprehension in the nation. The order of the justices in Quarter Session made at Bedford the previous month did no more than provide for the restoration to the churches of the Book of Common Prayer; and the Act of Uniformity did not become law till a year and a half later. It may be doubted whether there was another Justice the country through in such eager haste as was Francis Wingate. Perhaps he had an ancient grudge to feed. At the outbreak of the Civil War, his father's death made him a ward of the Crown, and his mother took him to the King's Quarters at Oxford, where they remained with the Royalists from September to February 1642. For this offence she had to compound with Parliament for such portion of her estate as she had by jointure, and to pay a fine of £100 to the Committee at Goldsmith's Hall. After her subsequent marriage with Richard Duncombe, she had also to take the negative

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oath and sign the solemn league and covenant.* Possibly her son did not forget this, and when his turn came he was eager to avenge the past. Indeed, he was more eager than wise. It turned out that he was singularly unfortunate in his first victim, and in arresting his prisoner he for all time pilloried himself.

When he found from the constable that the gathering at Samsell was only a meeting of peaceable harmless folk, Wingate turned to Bunyan and asked him what he was doing there, and why he did not mind his own business. To which Bunyan modestly replied that he had merely come to instruct the people, get them to forsake their sins, and close in with Christ ; and he thought he could, without confusion, both follow his business and preach the word. Wingate lost his temper at this, and said he would break the neck of these meetings, to which Bunyan simply replied, " It might be so."

Upon this sureties were called, were immediately forthcoming, and the bond was drawn up, Wingate emphatically stating that the prisoner must be kept from preaching till his appearance at the Sessions, otherwise the bond would be forfeited. Hearing this, Bunyan at once released his friends from all farther responsibility, saying that on these conditions the bond was useless : for he should certainly break it, he could not leave off speaking the word of God ; in that there could be no harm, and it was a work to be rather commended than blamed. This decisive utterance put an end, of course, to all farther parley,

* Royalist Composition Papers, G. 53 ; No. 146, p. 163.

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and Wingate retired to draw up the mittimus for Bedford Gaol.

While he was absent, in came one whom Bunyan describes as "that old enemy of the truth, Dr. Lindall." Lindall was vicar of Harlington, where he had been the last seventeen years. In 1635 he had been curate to Mrs. Wingate's father, Dr. Stephen Pierce, the vicar of Hitchin, and after Pierce's death had married his widow, so that he was Wingate's father-in-law. The old vicarage was only about two minutes' walk up the road towards the church, and probably having some knowledge of what was going forward at Wingate's house, Lindall came in to give this tinker-preacher a piece of his mind. He commenced taunting the prisoner with many reviling terms. Bunyan, with fitting self-respect, quietly told him in reply that he was not there to speak with him, but with the Justice. Lindall then angrily asked how he could prove that he had any right to preach? Bunyan replied that he had the right which the Apostle Peter gave when he said, "As every man hath received the gift, even so let him minister the same." A little nonplussed at this, Lindall fell into that abuse which is sometimes the refuge of men foiled in argument, and said tauntingly that he remembered reading of one Alexander, a coppersmith, who did much oppose and disturb the Apostles—"Aiming, 'tis like, at me," says Bunyan, "because I was a Tinker." Not to be behindhand, Bunyan replied that he too remembered something from his reading, to the effect that very many priests and pharisees had their hands in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was in the

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mood, he tells us, for going a little further still, but just at that moment there came into his mind the passage, "Answer not a fool according to his folly"; and after that he was, as he says, as sparing of his speech as he could be without prejudice to the truth.

By this time the mittimus was made out, and Bunyan started with the constable for Bedford gaol. As they were going down the road from the house, they were met by two friends, who thought that something might still be done for Bunyan's release. At all events, they would have him wait till they had been to Wingate and made the attempt. So he and the constable waited. Presently the two friends returned with the message that if Bunyan would only say certain words to the Justice he might be released. Turning to his friends with that earnest look of his, Bunyan replied that if the words asked for were such as could be spoken with a good conscience he would say them, not else—an utterance surely not unworthy to be placed by the side of that other of Luther's, "Here I stand: I can no other. God help me!"—an utterance, too, the resolute spirit of which has, in all ages, built up the rampart of liberty against the encroachments of tyranny.

The prospect was not hopeful, still all went back together to Wingate's house. "Wherefore as I went," says Bunyan, "I lift up my heart to God for light and strength, to be kept, that I might not do anything that might either dishonour Him or wrong my own soul, or be a grief or discouragement to any that were inclining after the Lord Jesus Christ." By this

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time the short November day was drawing in, and when they were once more in the house, there came out of another room, and holding up a candle, one William Foster, afterwards Dr. Foster, a lawyer of Bedford. He had married Wingate's sister Amy, some seven years before, but had lost her by death the previous year. Seeing by the light of his uplifted candle who it was, "What, John Bunyan!" cried he, "with such seeming affection as if he would have leaped on my neck and kissed me." But Bunyan held himself back, and did "somewhat wonder that such a man as he, with whom I had so little acquaintance, and besides, that had ever been a close opposer of the ways of God, should carry himself so full of love to me." He had not yielded to force, he would not now to flattery. "A right Judas," says he; and as in after years he saw what this man did, he remembered that it was somewhere written, "Their tongues are smoother than oil, but their words are drawn swords." We shall meet with this man Foster again and again during the next five-and-twenty years of our history. We shall find him as chancellor of the Diocese of Lincoln and commissary of the Court of the Bedford Archdeaconry, harassing the Nonconformists from parish to parish and from year to year. There was a sort of sinister significance in his appearance at this point, therefore. Coming in through the open door, with uplifted candle and inquiring look, he might be taken as the incarnate spirit of that era of persecution which was now at the door. With a tongue smoother than oil, as Bunyan says, he tried to prevail upon him to leave off preaching. There

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was the usual argument on the one side, to the effect that no man ought to preach Christ's gospel but he who was sent forth by bishop and by Parliament ; and the usual and sufficient reply on the other, that a call from God and a fire in the soul could not be kept within the bounds of bishop's licence or of the statutes at large. It was little use to argue further. The time for words had gone by, the time for deeds and suffering had come. "Thus," says Bunyan, "we parted. And verily, as I was going forth of the doors, I had much ado to forbear saying to them that I carried the peace of God along with me. But I held my peace, and, blessed be the Lord, went away to prison with God's comfort in my poor soul."

Foster's uplifted candle serves to remind us that it was growing dark as Bunyan and the constable left and that the night was near. Tarrying, therefore, somewhere in safe custody, they waited for the morning, when they started for Bedford gaol. This was thirteen miles away, the distance being probably travelled on foot through Pulloxhill to the high road at Silsoe, and so through Wilstead and Elstow. A strange world of experience seemed behind, and a new world was opening before as these two travellers, bemired with the November roads, made their way towards Bedford Bridge and over it to the grim prison at the corner of Gaol Lane. The old gate swung open to receive them, then swung back again to shut them in, and Bunyan left many pleasant things on the other side of it. But not everything ; not those divine compensations God gives to faithful souls even

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here ; not those visions of glory which for many a day were to gladden the gloom.

The news that Bunyan was in gaol soon spread through the town, carrying consternation to the hearts of his family and of his brethren in the Church. Could nothing be done ? They would at least try to get bail till the sessions. Mr. Crompton, the Justice at Elstow, was waited upon. He knew Bunyan, and was not indisposed to accept the offered sureties, but he was perplexed ; there had as yet been no other arrest for preaching, and thinking that there surely must be some more serious charge, and, on the ground that he was only a young man, he declined to act. Bunyan tells us that before going to meet the Justice he first committed the matter absolutely to the Lord and left it in His hands. If he might do more good by being set at liberty he asked that liberty might be granted. But if not, then God's will be done, for he was not altogether without hope his imprisonment might be the awakening of the saints in that country. Having thus in all simplicity committed the matter to God, there came into his heart that inward peace God ever gives to trustful souls. When he found from his gaoler that Mr. Crompton had refused the bail he was not at all daunted, but rather glad, and saw evidently that the Lord had heard him. "Verily, at my return," says he, "I did meet my God sweetly in prison again, comforting of me and satisfying of me that it was His will and mind that I should be there." He wrote these words immediately on returning to the prison chamber, and adds—"Here I lie waiting the

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good will of God to do with me as he pleaseth, knowing that not one hair of my head can fall to the ground without the will of my Father who is in heaven ; that, let the rage and malice of men be what they may, they can do no more and go no farther than God permits them ; and even when they have done their worst, we know that all things work together for good for them that love God."

Seven or eight weeks after Bunyan's arrest, the January Quarter Sessions came on at Bedford. There being then no shire hall in the county town the Sessions and Assizes were held in a curious old building known as the Chapel of Herne, and because it stood near to the Grammar School, sometimes called School-house chapel.

In this primitive Palace of Justice, Bunyan made his appearance for trial about the second week of January, 1660-1. The county magistrates upon the bench that day were Sir John Kelynge of Southill ; Sir Henry Chester of Liddington ; Sir George Blundell of Cardington ; Sir Wm. Beecher of Howbury ; and Thomas Snagg, of Millbrook, afterwards high sheriff. Their antecedents considered, they were not a promising bench for a Nonconformist culprit to appear before. Sir John Kelynge was chairman of the Sessions on the occasion. He had been long biding his time, and had therefore small inclination to be merciful. Called to the bar as early as 1632, there is yet from that time to the Restoration no mention made of him in the Reports. Clarendon described him to the King as "a person of eminent learning and eminent suffering, who never wore his

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gown after the Rebellion, but was always in gaol": and he himself, on his being made a Judge in 1663, speaks of his "twenty years' silence." He was one of the first batch of new serjeants-at-law called in 1660; in October he acted as one of the counsel for the Crown in the trial of the Regicides; and two years later he also conducted the prosecution of Sir Harry Vane, towards whom his conduct was unfeelingly harsh and insulting. He was returned for Bedford to the Parliament of 1661, and in May prepared the Act of Uniformity which was passed the following year. He vacated his seat in 1663 on being made a judge of King's Bench, and two years later became Lord Chief Justice.

Of the other magistrates on the occasion, Sir Henry Chester of Tilsworth and Liddington, Francis Wingate's uncle, was created Knight of the Bath at the coronation of the King a few months later, and was the justice who with so much angry feeling tried to steel the heart of Sir Matthew Hale against the appeal of Bunyan's wife, in the Swan chamber; Sir William Beecher of Howbury was knighted the same week that Bunyan was arrested, and Sir George Blundell of Cardington Manor somewhat later. Sir George was one of the delinquents whose estates had been decimated in Bedfordshire, in 1655, and who was therefore under some temptation to use the strong hand when his turn came. As late as 1670 we find him still vigorously persecuting Quakers and other Nonconformists, and on one occasion when property of theirs, which had been distrained, was put up for sale, and no one would buy, Sir George

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angrily declared that "he would sell a cow for a shilling rather than that the work should not go forward." He was a somewhat eccentric man and wrote a long Latin epitaph for himself in his lifetime, which is still to be seen on his tombstone in Cardington Church. The remaining magistrate, Thomas Snagg of Marston Morteyn, was subsequently sheriff of the county.

Such were the men before whom John Bunyan, of the town of Bedford, labourer, was indicted for "devilishly and perniciously abstaining from coming to church to hear divine service, and for being a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom, contrary to the laws of our sovereign lord the King." Bunyan must have smiled to himself on hearing the little meeting at Samsell described in such ponderous and awful terms; and on being asked by the clerk of the court what he had to say to the charge, he quietly answered that he did go to the church of God, and by grace was a member with the people over whom Christ is the head. Kelynge, impatient at this, asked him straight out, "But do you come to church, you know what I mean, to the parish church, to hear divine service?" Bunyan replied that he did not, whereupon they fell to on the subject of the respective merits of praying with book and without. The discussion became somewhat entertaining, but at length Bunyan's direct utterances seemed to one of the magistrates to be assuming a form so dangerous that he was for stopping

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him ; but Kelynge said there was nothing to fear, the Prayer Book was in no danger, "having been ever since the Apostles' time," a fact apparently not known to any church historian previous to Kelynge. Be that as it might, and let all be said for the Prayer Book that could be said, Bunyan told them that he for his part could pray very well without it. This was too much for these champions of Episcopacy, and one of them asked him if Beelzebub was not his god, while some of the others told him more than once that he was possessed with the spirit of delusion and of the devil. "All which sayings," says he, "I passed over ; the Lord forgive them." He contented himself with simply saying that in their meetings for prayer "they had had the comfortable presence of God among them, blessed be His name !"

Kelynge called this pedlar's French, told him to leave off canting, and asked him to show his authority for preaching. To Kelynge as to Lindall, Bunyan produced the passage from the Epistle of Peter about every one ministering as he had received the gift. Whereupon Kelynge, having recovered his temper a little, was disposed to be facetious, and while descanting against irregular preaching turned irregular preacher himself. "Let me," says he, "a little open that Scripture to you. 'As every man hath received the gift ;' that is, as every man hath received a trade, so let him follow it. If any man have received a gift of tinkering, as thou hast done, let him follow his tinkering ; and so other men their trades and the preacher his." Bunyan was proceeding to show that this piece of exegesis from the

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bench would not hang together with the next verse where the reference was to the oracles of God, when Kelynge, finding that he himself had by this time got out of his depth, would have no more. As Bunyan was going on to say that if it was a sin to meet together to seek the face of God and exhort one another to follow Christ, he should be a sinner still, for so they should continue to do, Kelynge stopped him and asked him point-blank, did he confess to the indictment or did he not? To which the prisoner replied, that he and his friends had had many meetings together for mutual help and exhortations, when they had enjoyed the sweet comforting presence of the Lord among them, blessed be His name ; in no otherwise was he guilty. Then said Kelynge, "Hear your judgment, you must be had back to prison and there lie for three months following, and if then you do not submit to go to church and leave off preaching, you must be banished the realm." If, after such banishment he was again found in the country without special licence from the King, he was told he should stretch by the neck for it. The gaoler was then ordered to remove his prisoner, who, as he went down, gave a parting look at his judge, and left these farewell words behind him, "I am at a point with you ; for if I were out of prison to-day, I would preach the gospel again to-morrow, by the help of God !"

"So being again delivered up to the gaoler's hands, I was had home to prison again." In this unhome-like home he remained the next three months, during the last week of which he received a visit in a semi-

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official capacity from Mr. Cobb, the clerk of the peace. Cobb came, as he explained to Bunyan, on behalf of the justices, to admonish him, and to demand his submission to the Church of England. Bunyan had been convicted under the unrepealed Conventicle Act of 1593, and all persons so convicted were committed to prison, "there to remain without bail or mainprise, until they shall conform and yield themselves to come to some church, chapel, or usual place of common prayer and hear divine service and make such open submission and declaration of their said conformity" as the Act requires. The submission was to be made publicly and at service-time, before the sermon or reading of the gospel. It was then by the minister to be entered into a book to be kept in every parish for the purpose and within ten days certified to the bishop in writing. If the convicted person did not make this submission within three months he shall "abjure this realm of England and all other the Queen's Majesty's dominions for ever." Three months' confinement had done nothing to subdue the spirit of this resolute prisoner. He still held to his purpose, and still defended their meetings, the object of which he said was simply to do each other as much good as they could according to their light, and not to disturb the peace of the nation.

Fortunately for Cobb's argument, and unfortunately for all peaceable Nonconformists, some three months before a foolish riot had broken out in London under Thomas Venner and a few Fifth Monarchy men who had read themselves out of their senses by literal

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renderings of the Apocalypse. Cobb made use of this riot to discredit all conventicle gatherings. Bunyan would not concede that the cases were parallel. Thieves might sometimes come out of the wood, but all men coming out of the wood were not thieves. For himself he was a law-abiding subject, and held it to be his duty to behave himself under the King's government as became a man and a Christian, and if only opportunity were given him he would willingly manifest his loyalty to his prince both by word and deed. Finding that threats prevailed not and that in argument he was worsted, Cobb fell to persuasion. He would have neighbour Bunyan to consider the matter seriously and submit himself like a sensible man. Could he not come to the authorised gatherings of the Church and be content to hear like other folks? had he received a gift so far above others that he could not hear other men preach? Bunyan modestly replied that he was as willing to be taught as to teach, and looked upon it as his duty to do both; and as for sitting still awhile, as he was advised, to see how things would go, he remembered that Wycliffe had said that he who left off preaching and hearing the word of God for fear of the excommunication of man was already excommunicated of God, and would in the day of judgment be counted a traitor to Christ. So they went on going the whole round of the argument by which officialism in all ages has tried to bind fast the free life of God; they went the same round as before and with the same result. Cobb, who seems to have been on the whole a fair-minded man, having

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to discharge an unwelcome and fruitless task, makes one more appeal to neighbour Bunyan, in which he is sustained in friendly manner by the gaoler. He would have him consider the matter seriously between now and Quarter Sessions and submit himself. "You may," says he, "do much good if you continue in the country, but what benefit will it be to your friends, or what good can you do to them if you should be sent away beyond the seas into Spain or Constantinople, or some other remote part of the world? Pray be ruled." Cobb probably only selected at random two countries which might have a nameless terror for a Protestant and Christian mind. It was all in vain. "Sir," said Bunyan, "the law hath provided two ways of obeying: the one to do that which I in my conscience do believe that I am bound to do actively; and where I cannot obey actively then I am willing to lie down and suffer what they shall do unto me. At this he sate still, and said no more; which when he had done, I did thank him for his civil and meek discoursing with me; and so we parted. O! that we might meet in heaven!"

Three weeks later, on April 23, came the King's coronation, when release of prisoners in honour of the event might be looked for from the royal clemency. Many did on that occasion receive their liberty, but Bunyan was not among them. The names to be recommended depended upon the local authorities, and these bore no goodwill to the resolute tinker-teacher. Barabbas was preferred to the master, no wonder therefore that felons were preferred to the disciple. He had dared to think for

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himself, to think differently from the men who happened then to be uppermost, and while they could forgive other crimes, they could not forgive this. Therefore while many gaol-bound men received enlargement at the King's coronation, Bunyan did not. That day, which ended in a portentous thunder-storm for the nation, ended in disappointment for him.

From April, therefore, till August he tarried on in prison. In the latter month was held what, though falling in August, was called the Midsummer Assize. Bunyan hoped something from this; he hoped he might now get a hearing in open court. Three several times, through his faithful wife, he presented a petition to the judge of assize, praying for this. The first time she presented it to Sir Matthew Hale, who happened that year to come on circuit to Bedford. He received both her and her petition kindly, telling her he would do what good he could, but feared he could do none. The next day, as the judge's carriage was passing through St. Paul's Square from the Swan to the chapel of Herne, the resolute woman threw a petition in at the window to Twisden, who was the other judge of assize. He caught it up snappishly, and told her angrily that it was all of no use, that her husband could not be released till he would promise not to preach. Undaunted even by this, the brave woman resolved once more to try Sir Matthew Hale. There was something about him which gave her hope: he was a Christian man, he was generous-hearted, he would, she was sure, help her if he could. In some pause

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of the business of the court, therefore, Elizabeth Bunyan made her way through the throng of lawyers, counsel, and witnesses to the judge on the bench. Again he received her kindly; but Sir Henry Chester happening to be near Sir Matthew at the time, dashed her hopes by telling the judge that her husband had been duly convicted, and that he was a hot-spirited fellow, with more to the same purpose. At this, Sir Matthew took no further interest in his great contemporary, and with sorrow in her heart, and probably tears in her eyes, Elizabeth Bunyan fell back again into the crowd. Edmund Wylde of the Grove, Houghton Conquest, was high sheriff that year—let us remember his name with honour, for he was the only man who spoke a word of cheer to the weary-hearted woman in this her day of trial. He had probably seen her in conference with the judge, and noted her disappointed look as she left Sir Matthew and passed by him on her way to the street outside. He spoke kindly to her, and cheered her on to one more effort on behalf of her husband. There would be yet an opportunity in the Swan chamber when the assizes were over, and before the judges left the town.

Taking the high sheriff's advice, Bunyan's wife made her way to "the Swan chamber, where the two judges and many justices and gentry of the county were in company together." The scene which followed has become classic in the fair annals of Puritan womanhood. Making her way into the presence of all these great people Elizabeth Bunyan, "with abashed face and trembling heart," turned to

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Sir Matthew Hale, saying "My lord, I make bold to come once again to your lordship." She then pleaded for her husband as only a woman can; pleaded that he had not been lawfully convicted, and that he had never answered to the indictment. At this, Judge Twisden spoke angrily to her, and Chester was especially severe upon her, saying, petulantly, over and again, "It is recorded, woman, it is recorded." Turning from this hard-hearted country justice to the more hopeful pitifulness of Sir Matthew Hale, she told him how she had been to London—a serious journey for a peasant woman in those days—to see if she could obtain her husband's liberty; how she had there delivered a petition to Lord Barkwood, which he had showed to some other peers in the House of Lords, who said they could not release him, but had committed his releasement to the judges at the next assize; to the judges, therefore, she had come with the warrant of the peers to make her appeal. Sir Matthew seemed as if he did not hear her; but Chester, true to himself, kept on saying, "He is convicted" and "it is recorded," and assured the judges that this husband of hers was a pestilent fellow, the like of whom there was not in the country. At this point Twisden interposed, by asking her if Bunyan would leave off preaching? If he would, she might send for him. "My lord," said she, "he dares not leave preaching as long as he can speak." What, then, was the use of talking about him? asked Twisden, to which she made reply that her husband simply desired to live peaceably and to follow his calling, and so maintain

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his family. "There is need for this, my lord," adds she, "for I have four small children that cannot help themselves, of which one is blind, and we have nothing to live upon but the charity of good people." "Hast thou four children?" asked Sir Matthew Hale, pitifully. "Thou art but a young woman to have four children." "My lord," replied she, "I am but mother-in-law to them, having not been married to him yet full two years. Indeed, I was with child when my husband was first apprehended; but being young and unaccustomed to such things, I being smayed at the news, fell into labour, and so continued for eight days, and then was delivered; but my child died." Sir Matthew, feeling the pathos of this touching story, exclaimed, "Alas, poor woman!" But Twisden, a man of quite another mould, rudely repelled her, and told her plainly that she made poverty her cloak, and that, as he understood, her husband found it a much better thing to run up and down preaching than to follow his calling. "What is his calling?" asked Sir Matthew, to which a chorus of voices replied, "A tinker, my lord!" "Yes," said the dauntless woman, "and because he is a tinker and a poor man, therefore he is despised and cannot have justice." Sir Matthew, apparently still sympathising, advised her either to apply herself to the King or sue out her husband's pardon, or obtain a writ of error. There was not much help for the anxious woman in all this jargon of the law; but there was more sympathy in it than the unrelenting Chester cared to hear. He grew more angry, and said, "My lord, he will preach and do

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what he lists ;” but, replied she, “he preacheth nothing but the word of God !” Twisden, too, irritated both at the persistent woman and his more lenient colleague, went into a great rage. Elizabeth told her husband afterwards that she thought he would have struck her. “*He* preach the word of God !” cried he ; “he runneth up and down and doeth harm.” “No, my lord,” said she, “it is not so ; God hath owned him, and done much good by him.” “God !” exclaimed the angry man ; “his doctrine is the doctrine of the devil !” “My lord,” said she, “when the righteous Judge shall appear, it will be known that his doctrine is not the doctrine of the devil !” Elizabeth Bunyan was simply an English peasant woman, could she have spoken with more dignity had she been a crowned queen ?

But the days had then come in England when, for a generation, truth had fallen in the street and equity could not enter. Nothing came of her pitiful plea, and while she went back to her lonely cottage her husband tarried in his cheerless den. All through that winter Bunyan remained in Bedford gaol, and when, in 1662, the Spring Assizes came round again, he made the most strenuous efforts to get his case brought on in court. But the justices and the clerk of the peace did so work it about that, though his name was at first inserted into the calendar among the felons, it was again withdrawn. “Thus was I hindered and prevented at that time also from appearing before the judge, and left in prison. Farewell.”

VIII

TWELVE YEARS IN BEDFORD GAOL

TILL recent years there was a rooted tradition and belief that the picturesque old gaol which had stood so long on Bedford bridge, and was taken down in 1765, was the place in which Bunyan spent the many years of his prison life. This was accepted without question till Mr. Blower of Bedford, in a letter to a local paper, first called attention to the difficulties in the way of an entire reception of the current belief. Subsequently, in the year 1868, Mr. Wyatt of the same town read a paper before the Archæological Society, sustaining the position taken by Mr. Blower. He pointed out, for example, that Bunyan's offence was committed, not in the borough, but within the county jurisdiction, and that the warrant by virtue of which he was apprehended was issued by a county magistrate, whereas the prison on the bridge was the town gaol and under the sole jurisdiction of the municipal authorities. A reference to the "Corporation Records" also showed that in the year 1671, when Bunyan was a prisoner, the bridge dungeon

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was swept away by a great flood in the river. The entry is as follows : "Whereas, through a sodain inundacon of y^e waters of Ouse the ston house called y^e Bridge house in this towne is totalie fallen down and y^e rest much shaken and like to fall, and y^e foundacon or pile whereon it stood, a great part washed away, &c." In this dismantled condition the Bridge Prison remained from 1671 till 1675, so that the last few months of Bunyan's imprisonment must have been spent elsewhere, even if the former part had not. But it is tolerably certain that the whole of the twelve years' imprisonment was spent in the County Gaol. Mr. Wyatt's position is supported by two or three considerations to which he himself does not refer. Not only was Bunyan arrested under the warrant of a county magistrate for a county offence, but, as we might expect, he was tried also at the Quarter Sessions for the county, and before county magistrates only ; and when at length his imprisonment was over and the time of his release had come, the king's pardon, under the great seal, described him still as "a prisoner in the common gaol for our *county* of Bedford."

And then, again, even if the prison on the bridge were at the disposal of the county authorities, which it was not, it was only a small apartment capable of holding some six or eight prisoners at most ; and we happen to know that Bunyan had very many more companions in gaol. His friend, who wrote the anonymous sketch of his life published in 1700, tells us that on the occasion of a visit he paid him in prison, "there was above three-score dissenters

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besides himself there, taken but a little before at a religious meeting at Kaistoe, in the county of Bedford; besides two eminent dissenting ministers, to wit, Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Dunn (both very well known in Bedfordshire, though long since with God), by which means the prison was very much crowded." It is a simple impossibility that these sixty people could have been locked up in the prison on the bridge, which would have been crowded to suffocation by a fifth part of the sixty.

Yet while thus putting the case on that side even more strongly than Mr. Wyatt did, I do not feel called upon at the same time to give up with him the long-standing tradition that Bunyan was imprisoned in the dungeon overlooking Bedford river, and that it was there he dreamed his wonderful dream. This tradition goes back at least to the time when Bunyan's own grandchildren were living in the town, and is therefore not lightly to be set aside. I think it will be shown hereafter that there is no need to set it aside. It is part of the truth, though not the whole truth; and all the requirements of the case are met by the explanation that Bunyan was again in gaol after an interval of liberty, and that it is to this, the last of his imprisonments, that the old tradition refers. In this chapter we can only concern ourselves with his first imprisonment; but when, in a subsequent part of the narrative, we have the whole of the evidence before us, I think we shall be led to the conclusion that Bunyan was in both prisons at Bedford, that his long imprisonment of nearly twelve years was in the County Gaol for county

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offences, and that his shorter term of six months was passed in the prison on the bridge, for the offence of preaching within the boundaries of the borough. The tradition of the latter imprisonment probably survived that of the former, because it came three years later, and after he had risen into greater prominence as the minister of the Bedford church.

The County Gaol in which Bunyan spent the twelve years of his life, from 1660 to 1672, was taken down in 1801. It stood on what is now the vacant piece of land at the corner of the High Street and Silver Street, used as a market-place. Silver Street, so named because it was the quarter where the Jews in early times trafficked in the precious metals, was afterwards known as Gaol Lane, but, since the disappearance of the gaol, has become Silver Street again. The only trace of the gaol itself still left on the spot is the rough stone wall on the north side of the market-place, which was the wall of the small courtyard used by the prisoners. From the interior of the prison, a massive door made of three transverse layers of oak, fastened through with iron bolts, and having bars across an open centre, is preserved in the vestry of Bunyan Meeting, Bedford, as a relic of Bunyan's imprisonment ; but no sketch of the building itself of any kind has come down to us. There were iron-grated windows on the Gaol Lane, or Silver Street side, and the older people of a former generation used to tell how the prisoners hung purses out of these windows on Sunday mornings, asking the pitiful help of such passers-by as were on their way to church or chapel. John Howard, in his quiet

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matter-of-fact manner, describes the gaol as consisting mainly of a ground floor and first floor. The ground floor was appropriated to felons, and had two day rooms, besides sleeping rooms. There were also two dungeons underground, one in total darkness, and reached by a descent of eleven steps. The first floor, which was for debtors, consisted of four sleeping rooms and one common day room, which was also used for a chapel, all the rooms being eight-and-a-half feet high. There was also a small courtyard which was common to all the prisoners.*

Such, so far as we can reproduce it now, was the place which was to be John Bunyan's home during the next twelve years of his life. He took in with him two familiar friends. "There also," says his visitor, "I surveyed his library, the least and yet the best that ever I saw, consisting only of two books—a "Bible" and the "Book of Martyrs."

The hardships of Bunyan's prison life during these twelve years have been variously described, being now exaggerated and now minimised, according to the writer's point of view.

Mr. Froude almost seems, in his *Life of Bunyan*,† to have accepted a brief on behalf of Bunyan's persecutors. To him they appear, on the whole, to be patient, estimable persons who, unfortunately for themselves, had to deal with an impracticable and wrong-headed man. There was, he thinks, every

* "State of the Prisons in England and Wales." By John Howard. Third edition, 1785, p. 283.

† "English Men of Letters." Bunyan. By J. A. Froude. 1880.

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desire on their part to avoid extremities ; and if Bunyan had only reflected, he would have seen in Venner's insurrection a real reason for the temporary enforcement of the Act against conventicles. As that insurrection, however, did not take place till Bunyan had been in prison six weeks it is not easy to see how it could account for his own arrest, and as this enforcement, which is described as temporary, lasted in Bunyan's case for twelve years, no amount of reflection could have enabled him to see the real reason of it so clearly as Mr. Froude seems to have done. Bunyan, he says, was not asked to give up preaching, only public preaching, that is to say—though speaking to a few people in a cottage at Sam-sell was plainly illegal—these excellent magistrates would not have made it penal for him to speak to a neighbour whom he might chance to meet in the High Street. England was really free England still, and Bedfordshire justices went to the utmost limits of indulgence, only, unfortunately, Bunyan did not understand the law or appreciate their forbearance. They were really aiming at his good if he had only known it. They kept him in prison to save him from transportation across the seas, and the most real kindness they could show him was to leave him where he was.

Then, as to his imprisonment. Much eloquent declamation, Mr. Froude thinks, has been wasted upon it. That imprisonment might have ended at any time if only Bunyan, surrendering an Englishman's valued right of free speech, would have confined his addresses to private circles, how private and why

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private, Mr. Froude does not say. It did end after six years, and though he was arrested again, at the end of six years more he was again let go. It is certainly true that a third time he was again taken prisoner, but this third time he was detained only a few months, and that only as a matter of form. After this release the policy of the Government was changed, and he was then free for the rest of his life. What could be simpler or more satisfactory? We feel ourselves almost convinced by this kind of reasoning, were it not that as we listen the suspicion creeps upon us that it might be possible in this way to defend the most iniquitous law ever enacted, and to palliate the most grievous tyranny under which human life was ever degraded. Resistance to wrong is the very life-breath of freedom. If men tamely submitted to despotism, despotism would be a perpetual inheritance. Some brave soul must bleed if ever unrighteous laws are to die, some heroic spirit must gather the sheaf of spears into his own breast if ever the fatherland is to be free. Surely Mr Froude is writing in a nobler strain and worthier of his better self when he afterwards applauds the constancy of the prisoner in Bedford gaol, and says: "Be true to yourself whatever comes, even if damnation comes. Better hell with an honest heart than heaven with cowardice and insincerity!"

The gaol at Bedford was probably not one of the worst in those times. It certainly was not so hideous as some of those—the one at Launceston, for example—in which George Fox sometimes found himself. But very few prisons in England in the seventeenth

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century were even decent, and there is no reason to suppose that the one at Bedford was an exception to the general rule. Even in John Howard's time the day rooms were without fire-places, and the prisoners slept on straw, £5 a year being allowed to the gaoler for the purpose. In his day, too, gaol fever broke out, carrying off several of the prisoners, William Daniel, the surgeon, and many of the townspeople outside.* A century earlier the state of things was probably still worse. There is contemporary evidence that it was not better. John Bubb, who was in Bedford gaol in 1666, and therefore at the same time as Bunyan, sent up a pitiful petition to the king, stating that he had been in this prison for a twelvemonth, in which time he says, "He hath suffered as much misery as soe dismall a place could be capable to inflict, and soe is likely to perish without His Majestie's further compassion and mercy towards him." Bubb sent also a petition to Sir William Morton, one of the judges of assize at Bedford, praying to be released from prison, "where he hath long remained in a calamitous condicon." †

* *State of Prisons*, 1785, p. 283.

† *State Papers, Dom.*, Chas. II., 1666. This man was ultimately released. He had been charged with killing George Edwards, in a drunken brawl at Leighton Buzzard, but the doctor at Eversholt, and Dorothy Sparks, a *gentlewoman surgeon* of good repute at Woburn, attested that Edwards lived a month after the wound given him by Bubb. A good deal of interest was taken in Bubb's case, and by request of Francis Wingate, of Harlington, a collection was made for him in Toddington Church, amounting to 11s. 7d. One wonders whether Mr. Wingate took any farther interest in Bubb's fellow prisoner, Bunyan?

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But it may be said that though money cannot in these days purchase mitigations and comforts for prisoners, it could in those, and Mr. Froude is of opinion that the Church at Bedford would see to it that Bunyan had them. "To have abandoned to want their most distinguished pastor would have been intensely discreditable" to them, and, for his part, he will not "charge so reputable a community with a neglect so scandalous." This view of the case, however, appears less forcible when we remember that, as indeed Mr. Froude himself a few pages further on tells us, Bunyan was really not chosen pastor at Bedford till after his release. He was therefore not their minister at all till 1672, when his imprisonment was over, and he certainly could not be said to be distinguished till six years later still, when, in 1678, his "Pilgrim" saw the light. The little community of which he was then simply a private member, would doubtless do all they could for a brother so greatly beloved, but they could not do all they would. For many of them were themselves at various times his fellow prisoners in Bedford gaol; others had to flee from their homes to avoid arrest; and many were stripped of their possessions to pay the ruinous fines imposed upon them as Nonconformists.

That Bunyan had an amount of liberty which in the case of a prisoner nowadays would be simply impossible, is beyond all question. But considerable mistakes have been made in this matter by writers who have applied to the whole of his imprisonment a statement which Bunyan carefully confines to the six months between the Autumn Assizes of 1661 and the

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Spring Assizes of 1662, when he was doing his utmost to get his name inserted in the calendar of prisoners for trial. This, for obvious reasons, was an exceptional period, and he carefully notes that it was "between these two assizes I had by my Jailor some liberty granted me, more than at the first, and how I followed my wonted course of preaching, taking all occasions that was put into my hand to visit the people of God," "also having somewhat more liberty I did go to see Christians at London." But while he tells us this he tells us also that this unusual liberty soon came to an end, for "my enemies hearing of it were so angry that they had almost cast my Jailor out of his place, threatening to indite him, and to do what they could against him. . . . Whereupon my liberty was more straightened than it was before; so that I must not look out of the door."

This necessity for greater accuracy applies also to the statement often made, that during his imprisonment Bunyan was present at the meetings of the Church of which he was a member. This is true as applied to some portions of the time, but it is also true that from October 28, 1661, to October 9, 1668, or for the long period of seven years out of the twelve, his name does not once occur in the records of the Church. After that, for the next four years it occurs occasionally. The probability is that his experience of hardship varied as the gaol administration varied. A contemporary writer tells us that he was "sometimes under cruel and oppressive gaolers in an uncomfortable and close prison," and another says that on the commencement of his second term

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of imprisonment in 1666, "Even the jailor took such pity of his rigorous sufferings that he did as the Egyptian jailor did to Joseph, put all care and trust into his hands." The matter is very simple. Cynical pooh-poohing of painful facts on the one side is just as foolish and as needless as eloquent declamation on the other. Bunyan himself never whines over his sufferings; he was too manly for that. He deliberately made his choice, and as deliberately he accepted the consequences of his choice. He gave utterance to no bitter or foolish repinings on his own behalf; nor would he have wished any one else to do this for him. At the same time we cannot forget that twelve years' imprisonment more or less rigorous was inflicted on a man of two-and-thirty with the fulness of life and love of action which that age brings; that with strong affection for wife and children, especially for his poor blind child, he was prevented from earning for them that which they needed; that from the very beginning he felt, as he says, like a man who at the bidding of conscience was pulling down his house upon the heads of those he loved best; and when we remember also that, as a personal friend of his tells us, "When he came abroad" again after his imprisonment, "he found his temporal affairs were gone to wreck, and he had as to them to begin again as if he had newly come into the world;" I say when we remember all this as being inflicted on a man of genius and fine feeling like Bunyan, and for such offences as his, it is difficult to prevent surprise deepening into a stronger feeling when writers, who at other times seem to value human freedom and

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high-minded conscientiousness, thus in a covert way apologise for tyranny, and reduce conscientiousness to an obstinacy which is simply perverse.

To a man confined in prison for so many years during the most vigorous period of life, the right occupation of his time must have been felt to be a somewhat serious question. But in those days prisoners had to provide their own maintenance for the most part, and this necessity would stand first. The anonymous friend who first made Bunyan's acquaintance in prison tells us that he did not, while shut up there, "spend his time in supine and careless manner, nor Eat the Bread of Idleness, for I have been witness that his own hands have ministered to his and his familie's necessities, making many hundred gross of long Tagg'd Laces, to fill up the vacancies of his time, which he had learn'd for that purpose since he had been in Prison."

Besides this, and possibly other handicraft, which occupied the bulk of his time, Bunyan still held the position of spiritual counsellor to some who were permitted to bring their affairs to him in prison. In his life and death of Mr. Badman he says: "When I was in prison there came a woman to me that was under a great deal of trouble. So I asked her, she being a stranger to me, what she had to say to me." It turned out that she was in the service of a shop-keeper at Wellingborough, whose box she had robbed again and again, and smitten with remorse she came to ask Bunyan what she should do. Though in prison, therefore, he was the spiritual guide and confidant of some who were outside, and he had still

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upon mind and heart the spiritual care of those who had heard his sermons or heard of his fame like this conscience-stricken woman from Wellingborough.

Then again, though a prisoner, he was a preacher still. There were times during those twelve years when Bedford gaol was crowded almost beyond its capacity, and that too with saintly men and women who valued the truth of God—Samuel Fenn, John Fenn, and many more of his fellow members in the Bedford Church were there as his companions in tribulation. John Donne, the recently ejected rector of Pertenhall, was there also, so were William Wheeler, the ejected rector of Cranfield, and John Wright, the pious saddler of Blunham. John Donne was in the habit, after his ejection, of gathering his people for worship by night in Keysoe Wood. On one of these occasions, as we have seen, they were surprised by the officers of the law, and the whole body of them, some sixty in number, marched off to Bedford gaol. Thus there was a considerable congregation within the walls of the prison itself. The writer to whom we are indebted for the knowledge of these facts adds, "In the midst of the hurry which so many new comers occasioned, I have heard Mr. Bunyan both preach and pray with that mighty Spirit of Faith and Plerophory of Divine Assistance, that has made me stand and wonder." The day room on the first floor of the gaol which, as John Howard tells us, was used also as a chapel, was doubtless the scene of many heart-stirring times when the Lord was felt to be with them.

Some of the sermons there preached afterwards

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grew into books, and by means of friends found their way to Francis Smith, the publisher near Temple Bar, and through him to the world at large. In this way Bunyan's "Holy City," published in 1665, came into shape as he tells us himself: "Upon a certain first day, I being together with my brethren in our prison chamber, they expected that according to our custom, something should be spoken out of the word for our mutual edification; but at that time I felt myself, it being my turn to speak, so empty, spiritless, and barren, that I thought I should not have been able to speak among them so much as five words of truth with life and evidence." There came, however, a sudden break in the clouds; he seemed to see in the chapter before him "something of that jasper in whose light you there find this holy city is said to come or descend;" with an inward cry "I did carry my meditations to the Lord Jesus for a blessing, which He did forthwith grant according to his grace; and helping me to set before my brethren, we did all eat and were well-refreshed, and behold also that while I was in the distributing of it, it so increased in my hand, that of the fragments that we left, after we had well dined, I gathered up this basketful." The subject grew yet further upon him afterwards, and, "through frequent prayer to God, what first with doing and then with undoing, and after that with doing again I thus did finish it." In this vivid sketch we have doubtless the history of more than one of his prison books. For his good pen was his true friend during those tedious years, and we may gain some insight into the growth of his mind if we follow

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the order in which his books appeared during his prison life.

His first venture of a literary sort after his arrest was into the region of poetry in a work entitled "Profitable Meditations." This first of his prison books was lost till some forty years ago, when a copy was found in a volume of pamphlets. This copy, now in the British Museum, is in quarto, and, for the time, rather handsomely printed. After the publisher's name, Francis Smith, some person—who, judging from the colour of the ink and the form of the figures, was probably a contemporary—has added the date 1661; and at the foot of Bunyan's address to the reader, where he subscribes himself, "I am thine in Christ, John Bunyan of Bedford," the same hand with the same ink as that of the date has added the words "A Brasher now in prison in Bedford, 1664." The book is in the form of poetical dialogue, has small literary merit of any sort, and is simply interesting as being his first prison production, and as giving, in a supposed conversation between Satan and the tempted soul, the first idea of the parley between Christian and Apollyon in the "Pilgrim's Progress," the line of thought being somewhat similar.

His next book sent forth from gaol was one of stronger sort. It is entitled "Praying in the Spirit," and is a treatise on prayer by a man with whom prayer was a real grappling of soul with the Eternal, living commerce with the living God. "Much," says he, "of my own experience could I here discover." He has, he says, found prayer to be the

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opener of the heart to God, and a means by which the soul, though empty, is filled. It is a living thing done in sincerity—that sincerity which is the same in a corner alone as it is before the face of the world. It knows not how to wear two vizards, one for an appearance before men, and another for a short snatch in a corner, but it must have God, and be with Him in the duty of prayer. It is not lip-labour that it doth regard, for it is the heart that God looketh at. Prayer carries with it a sense of sin when the soul is overpressed with grief and bitterness, a sweet sense of mercy received when the prayers of saints are turned into thanksgiving, and yet are prayers still; and a sense of mercy to be received when the man not by fits and starts, but mightily, fervently, and continually groans out his condition before the Lord.

Apart from the deep spiritual vein in the book it is interesting as a kind of prison manifesto of the reasons which made him so resolute against using the forms found in the Book of Common Prayer. In his account of his imprisonment, when speaking of the period of six months' comparative freedom between the Autumn and Spring Assizes of 1661–2, he says he “took all occasions that were put into his hand to visit the people of God, exhorting them to be steadfast in the faith of Jesus Christ, and to take heed that they touched not the Common Prayer,” the use of which was now being revived with so much vigour through the kingdom. This second prison book, written in 1662, and published the following year, is evidently the substance of the

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addresses thus delivered. He returns to this point again and again. Speaking of what prayer really is, he says : " A good sense of sin and the wrath of God, and some encouragement from God to come unto Him is a better common prayer book than that which is taken out of the papistical mass-book, being the scraps and fragments of the devices of some popes, some friars, and I know not what." The men who are so zealous in thrusting this book upon their neighbours, who are hot for the form and not for the power of praying, judging from their drunken debauched lives, know scarcely one in forty of them what it is to be born again. In somewhat satirical vein he reminds his readers that the Apostle Paul, in his humility, said he knew not what he should pray for as he ought, yet surely he was as capable as any pope or proud prelate in the Church of Rome. He was fain to come off with sighs and groans, sighs and groans too deep for utterance. " But here now the wise men of our days are so well skilled as that they have both the matter and manner of their prayers at their finger-ends ; setting such a prayer for such a day, and that twenty years before it comes. One for Christmas, another for Easter, and six days after that. They have also bounded how many syllables must be said in every one of them at their public exercises. For each saint's day also they have them ready for the generations yet unborn to say. They can tell you also when you should kneel, when you shall stand, when you should abide in your seats, when you should go up into the chancel, and what you should do when you come there. All which the

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apostles come short of, as not being able to compose so profound a manner." He is angry that men of the most dissolute lives should be counted the only honest men because they come to Church and say Our Father, while those of more sober principles who scruple vain traditions must be looked upon to be the only enemies of God and the nation. "Though a man be willing to live never so peaceably, yet because he cannot for conscience' sake own that for one of the most eminent parts of God's worship which He never commanded, must he be looked upon as factious, seditious, erroneous, heretical—a disparagement to the Church, a seducer of the people, and what not." "If," concludes he, "you desire the clearing of the minor, look into the jails of England, and into the alehouses of the same; and I trow you will find those that plead for the spirit of prayer in the jail, and them that look after the form of men's inventions only in the alehouse."

Bunyan's third prison-book appeared the same year as his work on prayer. It was entitled "Christian Behaviour," and is a treatise upon a true life as the fitting outcome of a sound faith. Christian men should be living men; he would have them take heed of being painted fire, wherein there is no warmth; and painted flowers, which retain no fragrance; and painted trees, wherein is no fruit. In the main the book is a plain common-sense utterance on the duties and relations of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants; but there are not wanting Bunyanesque touches here and there which show the hand from which they came. In

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the Second Part of the "Pilgrim's Progress" there is a charming illustration where Christiana, at the house of Interpreter, is shown the diversity in unity of the flowers of the garden, where some are better than some, yet where the gardener has set them they stand, and quarrel not with one another. The thought was anticipated twenty years earlier in the little book before us—"When *Christians* stand every one in their places and do the work of their relations, then they are like the flowers in the garden that stand and grow where the gardener hath planted them, and then they shall both honour the garden in which they are planted and the gardener that hath so disposed of them. From the hyssop on the wall to the cedar in Lebanon their fruit is their glory." Few things in his writings are more beautiful than this other simile, found also in this little book—"Christians are like the several flowers in a garden, that have upon each of them the dew of heaven, which, being shaken with the wind, they let fall their dew at each other's roots, whereby they are jointly nourished, and become nourishers of each other."

Charles Doe, in his Catalogue of Bunyan's Writings, assigned "Christian Behaviour" to the year 1674. Both he and Mr. Offor were evidently unaware of this first edition of 1663, a copy of which was found in 1864 among the books of a Nonconformist farmer of Staplehurst. This edition differs from the later ones by having the words "By John Bunyan, a Prisoner of Hope," on the title-page, and on the last page these parting words, "Farewell, From my place

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of confinement in Bedford this 17th of the 4th month, 1663." This interesting addition gives new meaning and pathos to the closing sentences of the book, which seem to indicate that he sometimes expected that the door of his prison-cell might one day open upon the scaffold—"Thus have I, in few words, written to you before I die, a word to provoke you to faith and holiness, because I desire that you may have the life that is laid up for all them that believe in the Lord Jesus, and love one another, when I am deceased. Though then I shall rest from my labours, and be in paradise, as through grace I comfortably believe, yet it is not there, but here, I must do you good. Wherefore, I not knowing the shortness of my life, nor the hindrance that hereafter I may have of serving my God and you, I have taken this opportunity to present these few lines unto you for your edification."

Between 1663, the date of this publication, and the end of 1665 there appeared from Bunyan's pen "Serious Meditations on the Four Last Things" and "Ebal and Gerizim," two works in poetic form which call for no special remark; the "Holy City;" "The Resurrection of the Dead;" and "Prison Meditations."

The "Holy City," which appeared in the fifth year of his imprisonment, had, as we have seen, its origin in a prison sermon. It is prefaced with a characteristic epistle to four sorts of readers, in which he anticipates that the learned reader will blame him because neither in line or margin has he a cloud of sentences from learned fathers. Learned sentences and words he gives not, because he has them not,

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nor has he read them. Had it not been for the Bible he had not only not done it thus, but not at all. The book itself is an exposition of the vision of the New Jerusalem given in the concluding chapters of the Book of Revelation.

The vision of the City of God was one specially suited to his peculiar genius, and full of suggestiveness. The city, he notes, has twelve gates, three to each point of the compass, to show that God hath a people in every corner of the world, and that from what quarter or part of the world soever men come for life, for those men there are the gates of life even right before their doors. On the foundations of the city are written the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb, because it is the doctrine of the Apostles that holds up the walls of the New Jerusalem, the doctrine upon which both Christ and grace and all happiness standeth firm and sure for ever. The right preacher is the man that can preach the doctrine of the twelve. In the end it shall not be as it is now, a Popish doctrine, a Quaker's doctrine, a Prelatical doctrine, and the Presbyterian, Independent, and Anabaptist, thus distinguished, and thus confounded and destroying. Then the city is of pure gold, as showing how invincible and unconquerable is the spirit of the people of God. For gold is a metal invincible even by fire; the fire may burn it, and melt and consume its dross, but the gold remains and holds its ground; yea, it gets ground even of the furnace and fire itself; for the more it is burned and melted, the more it recovers its colour and shakes off its dross and dishonour.

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Just thus it is with the people of God, and hath been so from the beginning; the more they oppressed them the more they grew.

This book, the "Holy City," was first issued without publisher's name in 1665, and again in 1669 with the name of Francis Smith as publisher. With the exception of the title-page, both editions are of the same impression, even to the "Errata and Corrections," and in both issues there is the following note:—"Reader, By reason of the Author's distance from the Press some Faults have escaped (notwithstanding the Printer's care), which thou art desired to correct thus." The corrections which follow are the same in both editions.

The book entitled "The Resurrection of the Dead" appeared the same year as the first issue of the "Holy City," 1665. In that year also appeared a poetical production entitled "Prison Meditations: Dedicated to the Heart of Suffering Saints and Reigning Sinners: By John Bunyan, in Prison, 1665." It would appear that some friend had written to him in gaol, sending him words of cheer and encouraging him to keep his head above the flood. This poetical effusion was Bunyan's reply to his friend. He takes it kindly of him, he says, thus to write to him, and assures him that his heart is still undaunted, for his feet upon Mount Sion stand. He is in prison, it is true, but then his mind is free.

For though men keep my outward man
Within their bolts and bars,
Yet, by the faith of Christ, I can
Mount higher than the stars.

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After sending forth this poetical epistle to his friend, Bunyan seems next to have set about the composition of a book, which, under the title of "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," gives, as he only could give it, the story of his life. This proved to be one of his most memorable compositions, and associates itself in one's mind with Augustine's confessions and the heart-utterances of Luther. In a preface, which is not the least powerful part of it, he dedicates the book to those whom God hath counted him worthy to beget to faith by his ministry in the Word. He is, he says, taken from them in presence, but his soul having fatherly care and desire after their welfare, now once again, as before, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, so now from the lions' dens and from the mountains of the leopards he looks after them all, greatly longing to see their safe arrival into the desired haven. He thanks God upon every remembrance of them, and even now, while he sticks between the teeth of the lions in the wilderness, he rejoices over the grace God has bestowed upon them. Their aspirations of soul, their tenderness of heart, their trembling at sin, their sober and holy deportment before both God and men is great refreshment to him, for they are his glory and joy. He sends them here enclosed a drop of that honey he has taken out of the carcase of the lion. He has eaten thereof himself, and been much refreshed thereby. In this discourse they may see much of the grace of God towards him. It was much indeed, for it was above his sins and above Satan's temptations too. His fears and doubts and sad months are now as the head of Goliath in his hand.

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The remembrance of his great sins, of his great temptations, and of his great fears of perishing for ever bring afresh to his mind the remembrance of his great help, of his great support from heaven, of the great grace that God extended to such a wretch as he. He would have them also search for the hid treasure of their first and second experience of the grace of God—to remember the word that first laid hold of them, their terrors of conscience, and fears of death and hell, their tears and prayers to God, and how they sighed under every hedge for mercy. Had they never a Hill Mizar to remember? Had they forgotten the close, the milk-house, the stable, the barn, and the like, where God did visit their souls? In writing this book he could have stepped into a style much higher than that in which he has discoursed, but he dare not. God did not play in convincing him, nor the devil in tempting him, neither did he himself play when he sank as into a bottomless pit, and the pangs of hell caught hold of him; whereupon he may not in telling the story but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was. He that likes it may receive it, he that does not, let him produce a better.

This book, which in parts is weird and terrible as his own picture of the valley of the shadow of death, is yet in its alternations a faithful transcript of the writer's soul, and must be read in order to a right understanding of the man as he was, both in strength and weakness. It appeared in 1666, the year of his first but short release, and was published in London by George Larkin. Till 1883 no copy of the first edition

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was known to be in existence, but in July of that year one was purchased at a sale for the British Museum. It is beautifully printed in duodecimo form, and is shorter than the subsequent editions by some fifty or sixty paragraphs. Some of the most interesting personal reminiscences and effective touches appear to have been added after the first publication. In this first edition there is no mention of his falling into a creek of the sea or into Bedford river, or of his plucking out the tongue of an adder, when he was a boy, or of his going to be a soldier afterwards. The whole of the characteristic account of his giving up bell-ringing in Elstow steeple, and of his dancing with the Elstow lasses was a later addition ; so, too, was the eminently interesting passage about his meeting with Martin Luther's "Commentary on the Galatians," and the long and earnest vindication of his character against the charges of in chastity, found in sections 304-317 of the edition of 1688 is entirely wanting in the edition of 1666. The pathetic references to his blind child also were intensified in the later edition, and all the way through little touches were added here and there which heighten the effect, and give finish to the picture. Whether they were all added in the second edition, we do not happen to know, since there are no remaining copies known of any edition between the first, of 1666, and the sixth, of 1688. In the first edition he says, "I was had home to prison again, where I have now lain above five years and a quarter, waiting to see what God will suffer these men to do with me." In the sixth edition he says he has lain

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now complete twelve years, and as he still retains the words about waiting to see what yet may come, it seems probable that no additions were made to the "Grace Abounding" after his release from prison, and that the edition of 1688 is simply a reprint of one issued about 1672, of which no copy seems to be known.

About the time of the appearance of the "Grace Abounding" Bunyan had a few weeks' brief release from his imprisonment. The friend who wrote the continuation of this book in 1692, tells us that after six years' confinement, "by the intercession of some in trust and power, that took pity upon his suffering, he obtained his freedom." Other events also at that time conspired to shake the resolution of the hard-handed men who were then in power. The Plague had desolated London in a way that was simply appalling, and in some instances had spread down into the country. It was even raging round Bedford gaol. Out of the small population then in the town no fewer than forty persons, as St. Paul's register informs us, died of the Plague, on the north side of the river, and were buried in a field, ever after known as Pesthouse Close. Then after the Plague came the great Fire of London, carrying terror through the country. And, what was even more to the purpose, Lord Clarendon, able but pitiless, the arch instigator of all repressive measures against Nonconformists, was beginning to totter, in his high place, towards that ruinous fall which was now so near. So there came a breathing space, of which Bunyan received the advantage, but not for long.

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Charles Doe tells us that "a little after his release they took him again at a meeting, and put him in the same gaol, where he lay six years more." Where this arrest took place, or for what offence, we are not told; but as he was again committed to the county gaol it must have been within the county jurisdiction.

But whatever the circumstances of his arrest, in 1666 and for six years more Bunyan was back in his old quarters in Bedford gaol. It is curious to notice that of this second period of six years' imprisonment we know very much less than we know of the first. In the first imprisonment he wrote and published no fewer than nine of his books; during the second he seems to have produced only two books, his "Confession of Faith," and the work entitled "A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith," the latter being written off rapidly in the space of six weeks shortly before his release in 1672. It is tolerably certain that his masterpiece, the "Pilgrim's Progress," though written in prison as he himself tells us, was not written during his longer term of twelve years, but during that shorter term of six months' imprisonment which fell in 1675. The reason for this opinion may be more conveniently given when we come to speak of the book itself and of that later time. After his frequent utterances from 1660 to 1666, his almost entire silence as an author from 1666 to 1672 is certainly remarkable. Was it because he was not able to get any of his writings licensed and Francis Smith was now too carefully watched to be able to publish them unlicensed? Was it that the

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claims of his family's maintenance made greater demands upon his time now that the long continuance of persecution had made friends fewer? Or was it that he was becoming more broken-spirited and for a time at least had lost something of his old elasticity of mind?

In the early part of 1671, Edward Fowler, rector of Northill, in Bedfordshire, afterwards Bishop of Gloucester, published a book entitled "The Design of Christianity," a copy of which found its way to Bunyan in Bedford gaol the following February. This book roused in him once more the spirit of controversy, and within six weeks he sent forth a lengthy reply to the work, dated, "From Prison, the 27th of the 12th month, 1671." The writer though living only a few miles from Bedford is personally a stranger to him. "I know you not by face, nor your personal practice." He cannot tell, therefore, whether he is one of the many ignorant Sir Johns in the pulpits of the land; all he knows of him is that being first one of the ejected of 1662, and then one who afterwards conformed, he had shown an unstable weathercock spirit which could not but stumble the weak and give advantage to the adversary. It is his book, however, not himself, against which he protests, and this because it is alien to the Evangelic spirit of the Articles of the Church of England and therefore to the gospel itself. The writer seems to him to speak more of reformation than regeneration, more of the restoration of the merely natural qualities than of the impartation of the new nature of sonship in Christ. This is not

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enough ; it is not enough for the old nature to go forth in holiday clothes, there must be a new creation in righteousness and true holiness. In Bunyan's judgment Fowler makes too light of Christ's great sacrifice in its character as an expiation for human guilt, making it to appear that Christ merely holds the point of the sword of justice, not that he received it into his own soul, that he suspended the curse from us, not that He Himself was made a curse for us, and in this way steppeth over Christ's sacrifice as a spider straddleth over a wasp. A pale shadowy gospel like this the writer, he says, proves not from Scripture but from the Cambridge thinker John Smith, while John Smith goes in turn to Plato, and so they wrap the business up. Further, laying aside all fear of man and, as he says, "not regarding what you may procure to be inflicted upon me for this my plain dealing with you," he protests against Fowler's turning liberty to looseness by saying that in matters of worship we have leave to do whatsoever is commended by custom, or commanded by superiors, or made convenient by circumstances. For in this way you may hop from Presbyterianism to the prelatical mode, and if time and chance should serve you, backwards and forwards again and make use of several consciences. How then if God should cast you into Turkey, where Mahomet reigns as Lord ? It is but reckoning that it is the religion and custom of the country and that it is authorised by the power that is there, and then, for peace' sake and to sleep in a whole skin, you may comply and do as your superior commands. So he leaves Fowler for the

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present, destined to hear from him before the year was out.

The time for Bunyan's release was now nearer than he knew. Before this book was well out of the printer's hands he was out of the gaoler's. Twelve days before he dated the preface from prison the King dated the Declaration of Religious Indulgence from Whitehall. This declaration suspended, not by due course of law but by royal prerogative, the execution of all and all manner of penal laws in matters ecclesiastical against whatsoever sort of Nonconformists or Recusants. On May 8 following a petition was presented to the King in Council from John Fenn, John Bunyan, John Dunn, Thomas Haynes, Simon Haynes, and George Farr, prisoners in the gaol of Bedford, for being at Conventicles and Nonconformity. The petition was ordered to be referred to the Sheriff of the County, who was forthwith to certify the Privy Council "whether the said parties are detained in prison for the offences therein mentioned or for what other crimes." Thomas Bromsall of Blunham was sheriff that year, and seems to have acted with promptitude in the matter, for his certificate that the prisoners in question were simply "Convicted upon several statutes for not conforming to the rights and ceremonyes of the Church of England, and for being at unlawful meetings," was dated May 11, or only three days after the Order in Council. On the 17th, therefore, at the next meeting at Whitehall, it was "Ordered by his Ma^{tie} in Council, That the said petition of the Bedford prisoners and certificate of the Sheriff, be (and are

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herewith) sent to his Ma^{tie's} Attorney Generall, who is authorised and required to insert them into the Generall Pardon to be passed for the Quakers." This general Pardon under the great seal was witnessed at Westminster on September 13, 1672, and beginning with the gaol of Newgate within the City of London, specifies the names of the prisoners to be released from various gaols in the kingdom, and amongst them these: "John Fenn, John Bunnion, John Dunn, Thomas Haynes, George Farr, James Rogers, John Rush, Tabitha Rush, and John Curfe, Prisoners in our Common Gaol, for our County of Bedford."

But though Bunyan's pardon under the great seal was finally issued only on September 13, it is not improbable that his actual release took place as early as May; for on the 9th of that month he was duly licensed as a teacher under the Declaration of Indulgence. In the volume marked "Indulgences, 1672," and under the head "Congregationall," there is the following document, a copy of which Bunyan carried with him as his passport:

Bedford Licence for John Bunnyon to be a teacher in the House of Josias Roughed, 9 May, 72.	CHARLES, &c. To all Mayors, Bailiffs, Constables, and others, Our Officers and Ministers, Civill and Military whom it may concerne, Greeting. In Pursuance of our Declaration of the 15th of March, 167 $\frac{1}{2}$, Wee doe hereby permitt and licence John Bunyon to bee a Teacher of the Congregation allowed by Us in the House of Josias Roughed, Bedford, for the use of such as doe not
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conforme to the Church of England, who are of the Perswasion commonly called Congregationall. With further licence and permission to him the said John Bunyon to teach in any other place licensed by Us according to our said Declaration. Given at our Court at Whitehall the 9th day of May in the 24th yeare of our Reigne, 1672,

By his Ma^{ties} command,

ARLINGTON.

Thus constancy had conquered at last, and the right to teach was in the end conceded by the power which had spent twelve years in asserting that it did not exist. Those twelve years of memorable experience had been borne with a bravery and patience quite as memorable. Says his friend: "It was by making him a visit in prison that I first saw him and became acquainted with him; and I must confess, I could not but look upon him to be a man of an excellent spirit, zealous for his Master's honour and chearfully committing all his concernments unto God's disposal. He bore that tedious imprisonment in an incomfortable and close prison and sometimes under cruel and oppressive gaolers with that Christian patience and presence of mind as became a minister of Jesus Christ, and such a cause as he was engaged in and suffered for." He himself also, speaking of the fact that he was so long in bonds, quietly says: "In which condition I have continued with much content through grace." "I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything which can

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properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my Wife, my Children, my Health, my Enjoyments, and all, as dead to me and myself as dead to them. And second to live upon God that is invisible. I see the best way to go through suffering is to trust in God through Christ as touching the world to come ; and as touching this world to count the grave my House, and to make my Bed in darkness. That is to familiarise these things to me."

Thus he found like many before and since that the way of earthly renunciation is the way of heavenly peace, that by giving up all, we gain all. Yet like the rest of us he found this path steep and arduous. "I found myself a man and compassed with infirmities. The parting with my Wife and poor Children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the Flesh from my Bones ; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and wants that my poor Family was like to meet with should I be taken from them, *especially my poor blind child*, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. O the thoughts of the hardship, I thought my Blind one might go under would break my heart to pieces." "Yet recalling myself, thought I, *I must venture you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you*. O, I saw in this condition I was as a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children. Yet, thought I, *I must do it, I must do it*."

His earliest struggles of soul seem to have been

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his severest. "When but a young prisoner and not acquainted with the law this lay much upon my spirit. That my Imprisonment might end at the Gallows for aught I can tell." Yet it was not hanging he feared so much as that when the time came to die he might be left without savour of the things of God, without any evidence upon his soul that all was well. "I thought with myself, if I should make a scrabbling shift to clamber up the Ladder, yet I should either with quaking or other symptoms of faintings give occasion to the enemy to reproach the way of God and his People, for their timorousness. This, therefore, lay with great trouble upon me, for methought I was ashamed to die with a pale Face and tottering Knees for such a cause as this." Then came this gleam of hope and cheer that he might even upon the scaffold give the message of life to the crowd who came to see him die, "and thought I, if it must be so, if God will but convert one soul by my very last words, I shall not count my Life thrown away nor lost." And even should it be that in the supreme hour of departing life God should hide His face from him, "'Twas my duty to stand to his Word, whether he would ever look upon me or no, or save at the last. Wherefore, thought I, the point being thus, I am for going on and venturing my eternal State with Christ, whether I have comfort here or no. If God doth not come in, thought I, I will leap off the Ladder even blindfold into Eternity, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell. Lord Jesus, if thou wilt, catch me, do ; I will venture for thy Name."

These days of storm were followed by years of

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calm, when his soul was kept as with the peace of God. It was of the years that slowly came and went in Bedford gaol he was speaking when he said : “ I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now. The Scriptures that I saw nothing in before are made in this place to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now. Here I have seen him and felt him indeed. I have seen *that* here that I am persuaded I shall never while in this world be able to express. I never knew what it was for God to stand by me at all turns, and at every offer of Satan to afflict me as I have found Him since I came in hither. As being very tender of me, he hath not suffered me to be molested, but would with one scripture and another strengthen me against all ; insomuch that I have often said, were it lawful I could pray for greater trouble for the greater comfort’s sake. Many more of the dealings of God towards me I might relate, but these out of the spoils won in battle have I dedicated to maintain the house of God.”

IX

THE CHURCH IN THE STORM

IN one of those quarto pamphlets which were the newspapers of the seventeenth century, there is an account of a tempest that in the year of Bunyan's release swept with unusual violence over the town of Bedford. It began with a great darkness which was soon exchanged for such vivid flashes of lightning "that the people of the adjacent places did believe the whole town of Bedford to be on a light flame." In the half-hour during which it raged, the storm lifted great gates from off their hinges, whirled the goods of the tradesmen out of their shops, and the stacks of the farmers out of their fields. "Twenty of Justice Barber's stoutest Elms were torn up by the roots, and one great Tree was carried from beyond the river over our Paul's steeple." Some of the churches were "much damnified," stone walls were hurled to the ground, and "two houses torne down in an instant to the dreadful amazement of the spectators." This stern visitation, the story of which was duly attested at the end of the pamphlet by Mithnal the mayor, Gardener the recorder, Christy

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the lawyer, and Rush the waggoner, would probably have been accepted by the Church at Bedford, as nature's own symbol of that other storm through which they themselves had been passing during the years between the Restoration of 1660 and the Declaration of Indulgence of 1672. We have followed Bunyan's personal fortunes during this period: it may be well now to go back and see what was happening to his brethren in the church while he was spending his time in gaol.

The new parliament met on May 8, 1661. The great majority of its members were cavaliers, old and young, and Church of England men to the backbone. Their mettle was quickly shown by the way they began business. The first thing they did was to pass a resolution that every member of the House should receive the sacrament on a fixed day, according to the form prescribed in the liturgy, and scrutineers were to report defaulters. To this parliament there went up from Bedfordshire, Lord Bruce and Sir John Winch for the county, and Sir John Kelynge and Richard Taylor for the borough. The next month the House set about the Act of Uniformity, Sir John Kelynge being appointed with others to draw up the Bill, which was read for the first time on January 14, 1662. The House was prepared for much, but a measure so drastic roused strong resistance even in such a parliament as that. It was opposed at every step, and important as its consequences have been for more than two centuries, it was only passed eventually by a majority of six, the numbers being 186 for and 180 against.

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'The difficulties in the way of the Bill in the House of Lords were even greater than those in the Commons, some of the peers wishing to exempt schoolmasters and ministers acting as tutors. There was a conference of the two Houses, when the Lords, more liberal than the Commons, reminded the latter of the King's declarations from Breda in favour of tender consciences, the Commons replying that a schismatical conscience was not a tender conscience. But at length, after much delay, the Bill passed the Lords on May 8. It was still hoped, however, that considering the narrow majority in the Commons, and the opposition in the Lords, the royal assent would be withheld. It was a time of much anxiety through the country. Good Philip Henry of Broad Oak wrote in his journal, "A severe Act has passed both Houses of Parliament, but it is not yet signed by the King. Lord, his heart is in Thy hand ; if it be Thy will, turn it ; if otherwise, fit Thy people to suffer, and cut short the work in righteousness." It was even so ; hopes were vain and fears well-founded, for the King gave his assent on May 19, when the Act of Uniformity became law.

While other matters were involved of merely temporary interest, the two provisions in the Act of vital moment were the one which required that every minister in the Church should before August 24, openly, publicly, and solemnly read the morning and evening prayer, and after such reading, openly and publicly declare before the congregation his unfeigned assent and consent to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer ; and the other which

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made episcopal ordination indispensable to every minister in the Church, whether previously ordained in any other way or not.

These were the terms of continuance about which there was to be no temporising. Refusal of assent was to be followed by forfeiture of benefice; any person preaching after being disqualified should be subject to three months' imprisonment, and any person acting as a minister of the Church of England without having received episcopal ordination, no matter what his previous ordination might have been, should be liable to a penalty of £100.

Upwards of two thousand ministers of the Church, devout and, as they showed by the sacrifices they made, conscientious men, felt that the conditions were such as they could not accept. On the ever-memorable August 24, 1662, the Black Bartholomew of the English Church, they went forth from their livings and their flocks, the greater part of them not knowing whither they went. Thirteen of these were from Bedfordshire.

The church at Bedford having lost its minister by death some three months after the Restoration, was deprived of its place of meeting two years before the Act of Uniformity came into force. Had John Burton lived longer, he would probably have added one more to the ejected clergy of Bedfordshire, in 1662, but dying as he did at the very crisis of change, the living of St. John's fell vacant at a time when the Corporation were little likely to appoint a successor acceptable to the Church which had worshipped there for seven years past. The brethren therefore

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found themselves deprived of their place of meeting as early as the autumn of 1660. After this they met where they could, sometimes in each other's houses in the town, and sometimes in the barns and kitchens of farm-houses in the country round. In 1670, ten years later, we find them meeting for worship at John Fenn's house in the High Street; and from the records they kept it appears that they held their meetings also at Hawnes and Cotton End, villages about four miles distant, at Edworth on the Hertfordshire borders, and at Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire, some fifteen miles away. The following are a few extracts from the minutes of the church between 1660 and 1663 :

"We are agreed to set apart y^e 12th of y^e next moneth to seeke the Lord in y^e behalfe of the congregation, that God would directe and keepe us in such a time as this ; and also for all the churches of God and for y^e nation, that he would direct our governors in their meeting together.

"The Church (notwithstanding their sore persecutions now come upon them) having spent many dayes in prayer with fasting, to seeke a right way of the Lord in this matter; did joyntly make choyce of brother Samuell ffenne (now lately delivered out of prison) and brother John Whiteman for their pastors and elders, to minister the word and ordinances of Jesus Christ to them; and they at this meeting did solemnly before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angells, give up themselves to serve, feed, and watch over this congregation, for Jesus' sake (according to the charge layde upon them and

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accepted by them) according to the measure of grace received.

“God appearing in his glory to build up his Zion, there was with joy received into fellowship with this congregation Jonah Whittimore, Henery Warde, Elizabeth Maxye, Sister Locke, and Joane Layton.”

* * * * *

After the last entry for 1663, there comes a long and ominous gap of five years and a half, the next recorded meeting of the Church being held at Hawnes on September 9, 1668. To understand the meaning of this break in the records we must briefly recall the policy of the nation in the interval.

The immediate effect of the Act of Uniformity was to drive through the nation that line of cleavage which has continued ever since. There had, of course, been varied phases of Nonconformity before, but never so distinctly defined and separated as after 1662. Henceforth there were on one side of the line those who accepted Episcopacy and conformed to its ritual and requirements, and on the other the Nonconformists, who, as they contended, on scriptural grounds declined to do this and preferred a simpler and freer worship. Between these two opposing parties there was to be for years no truce or parley. The Act of Uniformity having become law, Clarendon, as he himself says, “thought it absolutely necessary to see obedience paid to it without any connivance.” The policy of the Church towards Nonconformity was therefore to be a policy of stamping out. It remained to be seen which side could hold out longest. As

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Beza said to the King of France, it is the part of the Church to suffer rather than to strike, but it is an anvil that has worn out a good many hammers. In the days of the second Charles it was destined to wear out one hammer more.

In 1664 the Conventicle Act passed through Parliament. This Act provided that the first offence of being in a conventicle or meeting of more than five persons in addition to the members of a family, for any religious purpose not in conformity with the Church of England, should be punished with a fine of £5 or three months' imprisonment, the second with a fine of £10 or six months', and the third, after trial and conviction at the Assizes or Quarter Sessions, by transportation for seven years, unless the person convicted redeemed himself by paying down £100. The Act was to come into operation on July 1, 1664, and to be in force for three years.

This Act is the explanation of the long and ominous silence in the Bedford Church book. The members of that church still kept up their meetings for worship, as is shown by the remonstrances afterwards addressed to those who stayed away from them; but their gatherings were in secret places, and they kept no minutes of their proceedings. In prison and out, fined and ruined by accumulated fines, they went on their way for five years. Some quailed before the storm, "breaking covenant with God, and fellowship with this congregation," or "recanting their profession at a General Quarter Sessions," or being "openly and profanely bishopt to the great profanation of God's order and the heartbreaking of their Christian

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brethren." But there was always a stout-hearted remnant who stood firm and quailed not.

The Act of Uniformity fell mainly upon the ministers among the Nonconformists, the Conventicle Act upon the people. In October 1665 the Five Mile Act followed the Conventicle Act, and was another blow aimed at the ministers, banishing them under a penalty of £40 to a distance of five miles from any city or town-corporate, or borough sending members to Parliament, or any parish or place where they had formerly preached or taught. The chief promoters of this heartless and cruel measure were Clarendon, Archbishop Sheldon, and Dr. Seth Ward, bishop of Salisbury, and its immediate effect was to banish hundreds of blameless men, deprived of their livings and struggling for bread, to a distance from all their friends, into obscure places where there was no chance of earning a livelihood.

The Conventicle Act expired on March 2, 1667-8, and Parliament set about its renewal; indeed, the bill for that purpose had passed the Commons on April 28, by 144 votes to 78; but before it could pass the Lords, on May 9 the two Houses adjourned by the king's desire, and the Act was therefore not renewed.

It was seventeen months before Parliament met again, and, as there was now no Conventicle Act, during that brief breathing time the Nonconformists enjoyed more liberty than they had done since 1663. Both in London and the country they were connived at, and people went openly to their meetings, without fear. John Bradshaw, the vicar of St. Paul's in Bedford,

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thought indeed that this liberty, small as it was, would be the country's ruin. In a letter to the Dean of Lincoln, dated June 13, 1668, he says, "The separatists increase daily. God amend all things in this nation." This accounts for the fact that in 1668 the church at Bedford held its meetings again and commenced once more, after five years and a half, that record of its acts which has never been interrupted since. Forthwith we come upon the following entries, which must have been recorded with very mingled feelings :

"Bedford, y^e 30th day of the 8th moneth. Many of the friends having in these troublous times withdrawne themselves from close walking with the Church and not being reclaimed by those admonitions, that, as time would serve, had been sent to them formerly, some also being guilty of more grosse miscarriages, the Congregation having kept certaine days with fasting and prayer, bewailed their fall, did now agree in a solemne way to renew their admonitions; And did agree That brother Samuel ffenne and brother John ffenne and brother Bunyan should speake with brother Robert Nelson and admonish him for his withdrawing from the Church and other miscarriages. And that brother Samuell ffenne and brother John Croker go to our brother Richard Deane, to admonish him and rebuke him for his withdrawing from the assemblyes of the saints, and to inquire into y^e truth of those scandalous reports that we heare concerning him. It was desired also that brother Bunyan and brother Harrington send for brother Merrill and admonish him concerning his withdrawing

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from the Church and his conformity to y^e world's way of worship. And brother Bunyan and brother Cooper were appointed to go to brother Coventon to admonish him and endeavour his conviction for his sin in withdrawing from the Church assemblies.

“At a full assembly of this Congregation, the 21st day of the 10th moneth: Humphrey Merrill was cut off from, and cast out of this Church of Christ, ffor—

“1. Breaking covenant with God and fellowship with this congregation.

“2. ffor an open recanting his profession at a General Quarter Sessions.

“3. And rejecting and trampling upon the admonitions and intreaties, and all indeavours of the Church, to recover him to amendment of life: disdainefully returning for their care and indeavours to reclaime him such ungodly railings as these: That they had their hands in the blood of the King: that they were disobedient to government, and that they were not a Church; despising also the gifts of and doctrines of God in the Congregation: together with severall other false and heinous accusations.

“Things laide to y^e charge of Richard Deane:

“1. ffor that he after a very ungodly manner separated himself from this congregation and the word and ordinances of Christ therein.

“2. He after this lived a loose and ungodly life accompanied with defrauding in his calling; selling to severall persons deceitfull goodes, to the great scandall of our profession.

“3. ffor speaking contemptuously of the Church.

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“4. He went in the name of the Church, particularly naming Joh. Bunyan and Sam. ffenne, and yet wholly without their knowledge or consent, to beg the charity of y^e good people of St. Neots; ffor all which things, and many others, he hath bene admonished, by the space of some years; yet could not be brought to repentance for the same.

“Robert Nelson’s practises were as followeth:

“1. He forsooke the Church with the order of the Gospell therein.

“2. In a great assembly of the Church of England, he was openly and profanely bishopt after the Antichristian order of that Generation; to ye great profanation of God’s order and heartbreaking of his Christian brethren.”

If, however, there were thus in the little Bedford community those who, after running well, had been hindered and caused pain and heartbreak to their Christian brethren, there were others, as the following entries show, whose consistency and steadfastness were cause for gratitude.

“In the latter part of the yeare 1669 our brother Harrington being driven from his family to avoyde being taken with a writ *De Excom. capiend.*, and other friends having of long time had their habitation at a distance from us, the Congregation did appoint the Elders in their names to write certaine letters to them for their comfort and edification, the copies of some of them (which were sent with y^e Churches full approbation) being now come to hand are here inserted.

“To our brother Harrington was sent this follow-

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ing” [from which, as being evidently from Bunyan’s hand, some extracts may here be given] :

“Dearly beloved brother, Grace, mercy, and peace be with you alwayes. With length of dayes is understanding; your long progresse in the wayes of God and our ffather, hath given you rich experience. Wherefore, brother, make it manifest that you are one of those scribes we read of, not only instructed into but unto the Kingdome of God. Gravity becometh the ancients of the House of God: ffathers should be examples unto children. We are comforted in remembrance of thee, brother, while we consider that, notwithstanding thy naturall infirmity, yet thou prizest good conscience above thine owne injoyments: and since thou couldest not with quiet injoy it at home, thou hast left thy concernes in this world (though in much hazzard and danger) that thou mayest keep it abroad. But remember that good word of God: no man shall desire thy Land when thou shalt go up to appeare before the Lord thy God, thrice in y^e yeare. Wherefore let neither the remembrance of what thou hast left, nor thought of its being subject to casualty either distract thee in thy com̃union with God, or prevaile with thee to do aught against good conscience, or unworthy thy gray haire; which are then the glory of old men when found in the way of righteousness.

“You, brother Harrington, have lived to see the slippery and unstable nature that is in earthly things; wherefore we beseech you to expect no more therefrom, then the word of God hath promised, which is as much in little as in much thereof, if not more in

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many respects. While Israell sate by the fleshpots in Egypt they had no manna from heaven, they dranke not the water out of the Rock. We hope it is because God loveth you that he hath driven you from your incumbrances, that you may have occasion before you dye to solace yourself with your God and the Lord Jesus Christ. We meane that you may doe it with more leisure and lesse distraction than when y^e lowing of the oxen had continuall sound in your eares.

“God is wise, and doth all things for the best for them that love him. You know not but you shall know afterwards what sins and temptations God hath prevented by driving you thus from your habitation, and how hereby he made way for the exercise of some graces that could not so well discover themselves in their virtues when you was here. How subject we are to dote upon and to be intangled with the snares that lye couched and hid in the things of this present world, you have had great experience with us. When we are desolate then we trust in God, and make prayers and supplications to him night and day. God help you, therefore, that you spend your vacant houres not as they that wept for Tammuz, but as they who plainely confesse to all they are strangers and pilgrims in the earth. Arm yourself with y^t mind you read of, Heb. xii. 2, 3, 4, that you may have your garments alwayes white, and that your head may lack no oyntment. You cannot be there where no eyes are upon you. You are a spectacle to God, Angells, and Men; and being exalted to y^e profession of Christianity, and also to the

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communion of God and his saintes, you can neither stand nor fall by yourself, but the name and cause and people of God shall in some sense stand and fall with you. Yea, let us have joy in thee, brother, refresh our spirits in the Lord. And remember that God hath saide, Though there were of you cast out to the uttermost part of heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

“finally, brother, farewell. Grace be with thee. Amen.

“Written by the appointment of y^e Congregation to which you stand related in y^e faith of the Gospell, and subscribed with their consent by the hands of your brethren.

“JOHN WHITEMAN.

SAMUEL FFENNE.

JOHN BUNYAN.

JOH. FFENNE, &c.”

The letters of which this is a specimen, it will be remembered, were sent during the comparative lull in the storm which took place between the expiration of the Conventicle Act on March 2, 1668, and its re-enactment on April 11, 1670. From the fact that letters were sent to those who had to flee from their homes, it will be evident that persecution continued all through the time the Act was in suspense. This is borne out by local evidence of the most indisputable kind, that of the “Act-Books” of the Archdeacon’s Court. The record of the proceedings of Dr. Foster as commissary of that Court during the entire period the Conventicle Act was in force appears to have been lost from the Registry of the

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Archdeaconry. But, curiously enough, the minutes of proceedings relating to the very seventeen months when Parliament was not sitting, and when there was an abatement of the fury of the persecution, have been preserved, and show how little abatement there really was. Foster held eight Courts at the Visitations of the Archdeacon between May 6, 1668, and October 8, 1669—four at Bedford and four at Ampthill. The majority of the cases he dealt with, according to his own record, were those of Nonconformists, whom he fined, excommunicated, or imprisoned for refusing to pay church rates, dues, or tithes ; for refusing to come to church for more than a month ; for not having their children baptized ; for being present at the buryall of an excommunicate person ; for being at and keeping a conventicle ; for refusing to receive the sacrament at Easter ; for not being churched ; for being absent from church six months ; for teaching school without licence ; and for standing excommunicate above forty days last past.

Some idea may be formed of the amount of work Foster had to get through when we find that, during those two years, which were years of comparative exemption, more than fourteen hundred cases came before him for judgment from the towns, but chiefly from the villages of Bedfordshire. This includes great numbers of renewed cases of prosecution, as, for example, those of stout-hearted Quakers like Joshua Wheeler and Edward Franklyn of Cranfield, the Albrights and Colemans of Wooburne, the Laundrys of Bolnhurst, and the Rushes of Kempston,

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who were prosecuted at every one of the four Courts held for their respective deaneries. From all parts of the county, indeed, the most numerous and most persistent offenders were the Quakers, but there were also considerable numbers of Baptists and Independents, and a few Presbyterians. The culprits who, in such continuous stream, were brought under the penalties of Foster's Court in 1668 and 1669, were from various grades of life. Some six or eight of them are styled esquire, from twenty to thirty gentlemen, perhaps twenty are described as yeomen, and about as many more as farmers; but, as in all the persecutions which have fallen upon the Church of Christ through the ages, the vast majority were drawn from the ranks of artisans and the labouring poor. They were the great undistinguished crowd of cordwainers, hempdressers, husbandmen, weavers, warreners, plow-wrights, gardeners, fellmen, fullers, and the like. In deanery after deanery, and from village after village in Bedfordshire, their names stand recorded in the fading pages of Foster's "Act-Book," with his judgment and penalties written against them. But they make their appeal from his judgment to that of other tribunals—the tribunal of posterity and the tribunal of God, and they have not made their appeal in vain.

On April 11, 1670, the King gave his assent to the *New Conventicles Act*. This was more severe than the Act of 1664. Marvell calls it the "quintessence of arbitrary malice." It defined an Illegal Conventicle to be any meeting for worship otherwise than according to the practice of the Church of England which,

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if held in a house, should have present thereat more than four persons beside the family ; or if in the fields or any uninhabited place, more than four persons in all. The penalty for the first offence of attending a Conventicle was five shillings, and for the second, ten shillings, for all persons over sixteen years of age ; while the penalty for the preacher was to be £20 for the first offence, and £40 for every other ; householders allowing such conventicles to be held on their premises were to forfeit £20 for each offence. To facilitate discovery and conviction one-third of the fine in every case was to go to the informer and his assistants. At every point the Act was made to breathe the resolute spirit of those who passed it into law. Justices of the Peace and constables were empowered to break open doors in carrying out its provisions, and Lieutenants and Deputy-Lieutenants of Counties were to disperse assemblies with horse and foot, if necessary, and in any case of doubt, the Act was always to be interpreted in the way most favourable to the suppression of Conventicles.

This resolute spirit of oppression was met, as is usual in the case of Englishmen, with an equally resolute spirit of resistance. The Act was passed on April 11 and, within a month, had come into active operation in the town of Bedford. “ On Lord’s day (*May 15*) at the dwelling-house of one *John Fen*, a haberdasher of Hatts, many persons being assembled for Religious Exercise : One *West* and *Fecknam* (two apparitors), by a warrant from one Mr. *Foster*, who is a Justice of Peace and the Commissaries’ Deputy, did enter the House and force the Meeters to Mr.

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Foster's House, who fined every one of them severally according to their reputed abilities, and committed the Preacher to Prison." The following Friday Thomas Battison, a Churchwarden of St. Paul's, proceeded to levy the fines thus inflicted, beginning at the malt-house of John Bardolf. But John had been a little beforehand with the churchwarden and had sold his malt. The question arose, therefore, as the malt was no longer Bardolf's, whether it was legal to break open the malt-house door? While Battison and the other officers were debating this point in the open yard, "a great number of all sorts of persons were gathered about them, expressing (by turns) their indignation against him for attempting this against *Bardolf*, whom the whole Town knew to be a just and harmless man; and the common sort of people covertly fixing a Calves tayl to Battison's back, and deriding him with shouts and hollows, he departed without taking any distress there." This was not a good beginning; and, somewhat discomfited, the party made their way to the shop of Edward Covington, a grocer, to levy a fine of five shillings for his wife being at the meeting. Covington refusing to pay, Battison took a brass kettle for the fine, but when he had brought it to the street-door, the officers, probably afraid of the chaff of the crowd, refused to carry it away, and at last he had to pay a boy sixpence to carry it to an inn-yard; "but when the youth had carried the Kettle to the Inn-gate (being hooted at all the way by the common spectators), the Inkeeper would not suffer the Kettle to be brought into his yard, and so his man set it out in the middle of the Street."

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“The next day, which was the market-day, the Justices understanding how *Battison* was discouraged in his work,” and probably feeling that this brass-kettle affair was not a very dignified proceeding, “commanded the officers to break open the doors and levy the distresses. Immediately old *Battison*, with a file of soldiers and the constables, in the middle of Market-time, advanced again to the malt-house of *John Bardolfe* (scituate in an Inn-yard in the middle of the Market-place) and breaks open the doors and distreyned fourteen Quarters of Malt.”

Still the brethren met for worship as usual next Sunday morning, as if nothing had happened :

“The next day being *Lord's day*, Fines were doubled upon the Meeters, before the first could be levied ; for they assembling again at the same House, according to their custom, *Battison* with the two Apparitors, by another Warrant from Mr. *Foster*, entered the Meeting-place about nine of the clock in the morning ; but the Meeters refusing to depart before their Exercise was ended (unless forced) *Battison* sends word of it to Mr. *Foster*, who returns a Verbal Order that *Battison* should charge certain Gentlemen of the Town (whose names he had sent by the messengers) to assist him ; which *Battison* did, going to their houses to call them, though there were near a hundred common people spectators in the Streets. . . . About ten of the clock in the morning the Meeters went with *Battison* and the Apparitors (being constrained so to do) to the *Swan* in *Bedford*, where being kept till four of the clock in the after-

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noon, and their names taken by the Justices, they were set at liberty."

"Next morning Mr. *Foster*, the Justice, appears early in the streets, with old *Battison* and the two Apparitors, a file of souldiers and some constables, to see the Fines levied upon the Meeters' Goods; charging to his assistance such persons he sees, and sending for others to their houses, but got few or none besides his first company; most of the Tradesmen, Journey-men, Labourers, and Servants having either left the Town or hid themselves to avoid his call. The Town was so thin of people, that it looked more like a Country Village than a Corporation; and the shops being generally shut down, it seemed like a place visited with the Pest, where usually is written upon the Door, *Lord have mercy upon us!*"

But such assistance as he had Foster now set to work. In the house of Nicholas Hawkins, the cutler, and of Thomas Honylove, the shoemaker, they found the children sick of the small-pox, and naturally made short work of their visit there. At Michael Shepherd's they distrained for five shillings, and at Thomas Cooper's, the heel-maker, for forty, "distreyning three cart-load of Wood, cut especially for his working, which was of more value than any of his household Goods, he being a poor man, and living only upon making Heels and Lasts." Daniel Rich, a tanner and constable of his ward, had his best coat distrained for a fine of five shillings upon his wife, and John Spencer, the grocer, his shop-goods for a fine of forty. "After visiting and plundering Jay, the baker, and Isaac, the

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blacksmith, taking from the latter “ Locks, Shovels and the very Anvil upon which he forgeth his work,” they made their way to the parish of St. Cuthbert, to the house of Thomas Arthur, the pipe-maker. This man was somewhat of a celebrity in his time and now and again tobacco-pipes of his making, with “ T. A.” upon them, and with exceeding small bowls, as indicating the costliness of the weed in those days, turn up among the ancient *débris* of the town. Arthur’s door was locked when Foster arrived, but was opened immediately, and as Foster proceeded to distrain he was asked for what sum demand was made, to which he replied £11.

“ Thereupon *Thos. Arthur* desired to see the Warrant; which being produced, he, seeing himself therein but six pound, told Mr *Foster* so; to which Mr. Foster answered that there was five pound more for keeping his door locked. When *Thos. Arthur* perceived that Mr. Foster would distreyn all his Goods, he said, ‘ *Sir, what shall my Children do? shall they starve?*’ Mr. Foster replied, *that so long as he was a Rebel his Children should starve.* And so on Wednesday following, old Battison, the two Appirators, and a File of Musquetiers and a Cart, carried away what Household Goods they thought fit, and all the Wood, both within doors and without, necessary to his Trade, by three Cart-load, not leaving so much as to suffice for the burning of a Kiln of Pipes, ready set, though earnestly desired by the poor Pipe-maker himself, and also by others of *Battison’s Company.*”

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After distraining Robert Brown, the gardener, for a fine of three pounds—

“They passed into *Peter’s* Parish to the House of Mrs. *Mary Tilney*, Widow, a Gentlewoman, well descended, and of a good Estate, who was fined Twenty pounds; and to make her exemplary in suffering for that offence, Mr. *Foster* himself, being attended by his Publick Notary, will see the fine effectually levied upon her Goods; and indeed the same was effectually done; for (a Cart being provided for that purpose) they distreyned and carried away all the Goods in her House they thought worth their labour, as Tables, Cupboards, Chairs, Irons, Featherbeds, Blankets, the very Hangings of the Room, and Sheets off her Bed, insomuch that the Widow was forced that night to borrow Sheets of her Neighbours to lie on, being not willing to lodge out of her own House, though invited by her friendly Neighbours. As for the value of those Goods taken away, it is supposed to be betwixt forty and fifty pounds. Yet the said Mrs. *Tilney* was more troubled at the crying and sighing of her poor Neighbours about her (who were much affected with her Sufferings, she being very charitable), than for the loss of her Goods, which she took very chearfully. And so the officers left her, having finished this dayes work.”

“The next day being Tuesday more Fines were to be levied on the Goods of the rest of the Meeters. About ten of the Clock old *Battison*, with the Souldiers, and some Constables, whom he had warned overnight to be in readiness, marcheth up the High-street,

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where he levieth the Fine of five pounds upon *John Fen*, the Haberdasher of Hatts before-mentioned, at whose House the meeting was; taking away all the Hats in his Shop, and the next Day carted away his Household Goods, because there was but twenty-nine Hats in the Shop, beside Hat-bands, that they took away. Having thus dealt with this Hatter, he proceeds to deal the same measure to another Hatter, one *Samuel Fen*, who was also fined five pounds, and dealt with as his Brother before him."

So the work went on from day to day, from one parish to another, and from Bedford to Cotten-end, where Sir George Blundell of Cardington joined William Foster in his crusade, clearing out the weaver's loom and the farmer's cows, as the penalty for worshipping with those with whom they felt most in sympathy. At Cotton-End

"*Thomas Thoromgood's* Fine (at whose House the Meeting was said to be) was Nineteen Pounds, who was by the Officers distreyned, and all that he had, with the Implements of his Trade (he being a Weaver), taken from him, and the said *Thoromgood*, with his wife, is since departed away from their dwelling and gone."

These particulars, with others, are found in a pamphlet entitled "A True and Impartial Narrative of some *Illegal* and *Arbitrary* Proceedings by certain Justices of the Peace and others, against several innocent and peaceable *Nonconformists* in and near the Town of *Bedford*, upon pretence of putting in execution the late Act against Conventicles. Published

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for general information. Printed in the year 1670."

There was no publisher's name to the pamphlet, for to give that would have been to bring down vengeance upon the publisher; but from its appearance we may judge that it was issued from the press of Francis Smith at Temple Bar. The writer, who signs himself—it was not safe to say more—"Your assured Friend," makes a quiet and serious appeal to the public opinion of the time.

"The Narrative," he says, "is true, and will be proved in every part: the sufferers are chearful and peacable; their immediate Persecutors are the scum of the people, and chiefly the appurtenants of the Commissaries' Court; and the most forward instrument of that Sort is one that hath openly avowed and declared his Esteem for Popery above other Religions."

"This instance of the Execution of the late Act is not thus made publick, as though there were no other of the same kind in other places, but as one of the first whose Tragical Acts have been collected. Nor is the design of publishing hereof to cast any reflection on the Act itself; let it stand or fall in the Providence of God as it shall be found compliant with, or opposite to, the Honour and Interest of his *Majesty*, with the Peace, Welfare, and Prosperity of the Kingdomes. Councels for public good are the Province of our Superiours; ready obedience or peacable Sufferings are the lot of Private Men. There is no intention to meet Violence by Violence; it is the intention of their Enemies to hurry them into

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a disturbance of the Publick Peace. But all endeavours of that kind will be in vain, and the hopes of some about it wholly frustrate. It is nothing Else but the Authority of God in their Consciences which imposes a necessity upon them to practise those things in their Christian Profession for which they are made obnoxious to so great Sufferings, and gives them a supportment under them. The disturbance of the Publick Peace would be at once to renounce the Principle of their Actings and to deprive themselves of the Comfort of their Sufferings.

“The Ends, therefore, of publishing this Account, are plainly and only these: First, to prepare others for suffering; 2ndly, humbly to demand of our legislators whether this be the Garment of their Offspring? 3rdly, to give a clear Prospect into the sad Effects of the Prosecution of this Act, showing that there hath been very little regard to Law, Equity, Peace, Love, Humanity, or, indeed, anything that is desirable or useful among Mankind. Whether the Evils inflicted will be recompensed to the Kingdom by the Satisfaction given, Men, wise, peaceable, and sober, will in their own minds judge and determine.”

The same year there appeared a reply to this narrative, from the pen of Foster himself, of which a single copy survives among the pamphlets in the Bodleian.* He makes no attempt, for it would have

* “The Act against Conventicles Executed: with a Vindication of the Bedfordshire Justices’ Proceedings from the Aspersions of a False, Impertinent, and Libellous Pamphlet, entitled ‘A True and Impartial Narrative, &c.’” London: printed by W.G. M.DC.LXX. (Pressmark 4°. H. 32 Art.)

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been useless, to deny the facts of the case. But he seeks to diminish their damaging effect by retort of taunt and sneer and base insinuation. He goes even farther still, and the gross indecencies of his pages cannot, as they need not, be reproduced in our time. It would have been better to have remained silent. This pamphlet of defence is a deepening of the accusation. It is one more proof, if proof were needed, that persecution is a weapon that kills both at the breech and at the muzzle, that, though it may strike and wound those against whom it is directed, it yet more certainly debases and degrades those who use it.

X

THREE YEARS OF LIBERTY: 1672-1675

THE months between May 1670, when constables and musquetiers were making raids upon the Nonconformists of Bedford, and March 1672, when the Conventicle Act was suspended by the Declaration of Indulgence, may be roughly divided into two parts; the first extending to April 1671, when Parliament was prorogued, not to be called together again for two years; the second, embracing the following eleven months during which the King, uncontrolled by the House of Commons, did very much as he liked. The first of these periods was, of course, the hardest for the Nonconformists, who usually fared worse under the Cavaliers in Parliament than at the hands of the King. During this time a yet more determined endeavour was made to put an end to all religious services outside the Established Church. The business of detecting and suppressing conventicles was organised into a system under the local magistracy. Some of the worst men in the community found lucrative employment as spies; their pay

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depending upon the diligence with which they hunted down the peaceable people who frequented these gatherings. They had every inducement to be vigilant, for they received at the rate of £7 or £8, and sometimes even as much as £15, for a single successful conviction.

In special cases the offenders were reported to the central Government. Among the State Papers there is a Spy-book arranged alphabetically, showing how the district between Bedford and Cambridge was at this time placed under surveillance. It reports that one Audey lives at Meldreth, three miles from Royston, "where are concourses of many hundreds both Independents and Baptists," and how he rides into Herts, Cambs, and Beds, to gather concourses of people to their meetings; that Francis Holcroft stops at the house of Widow Hawkes, at Barlyn in Herts, and holds meetings in the neighbourhood, three hundred at a time, and also meets with many hundreds at Cambridge; that Lock, Audey's assistant, "takes turn to ride" to Hitchin, Paul's Walden, Bedford, and Shefford. The system of espionage had been more or less at work ever since the passing of the Act of Uniformity, but in 1670-1 it was more rigorously carried out than before.

Besides those who suffered at the hands of the local magistrates, others of the Bedfordshire Nonconformists were convicted in the Court of Exchequer at Westminster. In 1671, seventy-seven persons from the county were certified by the Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer as having been convicted and fined £20 each; their united fines with the monthly

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accumulations for persistent refusal to come to Church amounting to £4370. Sixteen of these were from Turvey, six from Ampthill, eight from Woburn, four from Westoning, of whom Lawrence Bunnion the joiner was one, eleven from Toddington, the remaining thirty-two being from eleven other villages of the county. The Deputy, in his certificate, raises the question as to the desirability of enforcing payment of the accumulations reckoned at the rate of £20 a month, by which, instead of the £277,090 due from twenty-three counties, there would accrue a sum of four or five millions sterling. "Upon the whole question," says he, "a considerable summe might be raised by putting these laws into execution, but," he cautiously adds, "what disorder it might produce in His Majesty's affairs is worthy consideration."*

The following year the severity was considerably mitigated, and Bunyan had so much liberty allowed him that the Church began to consider the propriety of electing him as their pastor, prisoner though he was.

The intention of electing Bunyan to this position had, probably, been for some time taking shape in the minds of the brotherhood. Many things seemed to point to him as the sent of God. Through a long imprisonment he had remained true to his convictions. Mentally as well as spiritually he had grown in grasp and power, as book after book of his, issuing from the press, had borne witness. His "Grace Abounding" especially, by giving them a deeper insight

* Addl. MSS., 20, 739, Co. Beds.

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into the workings of his experience, had given him a stronger hold upon their affection and confidence. His influence had grown and his power of service with it. When letters had to be written to their persecuted brethren and sisters, he was the chosen scribe; when anxious conference had to be held with wavering members, he was the appointed messenger. Still more, his power as a preacher commended him to them as the chosen of God to be the shepherd of the flock. In the month of October 1671, we have the following entry:

“At a full Assembly of the Church at Bedford the 21st of the 10th moneth: After much seeking God by prayer, and sober conference formerly had the Congregation did at this meeting with joynt consent (signified by solemne lifting up of their hands) call forth and appoint our brother John Bunyan to the pastorall office or eldership. And he accepting thereof, gave up himself to serve Christ and his Church in that charge; and received of the Elders the right hand of fellowship.”

Having thus made a more memorable election of a minister than they realised themselves, “God appearing in his glory once more to build up his Zion,” by the calling out of seven earnest men as preachers and workers with him in the villages round; the Church began to look out for a settled home as well as a pastor. It was now nearly twelve years since they left the church of St. John on the south side of the river, and during all that time they had been homeless wanderers, meeting now in each other’s houses, and now in fields and woods. They dared

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to hope that they had at last reached the end of the way of the wilderness. There was thus much foundation for their hope that the King had issued a Declaration of Indulgence in which he said :

“That there may be no pretence for any of Our Subjects to continue their illegall Meetings and Conventicles, Wee doe Declare, That wee shall from time to time allow a sufficient number of Places, as they shall bee desired, in all parts of this Our Kingdome, for the use of such as doe not conforme to the Church of England, to meete and assemble in, in Order to their Publick Worship and Devotion ; which Places shall be open and free to all Persons.”

The liberty thus granted was, by Bunyan's congregation, speedily accepted. One of their number, Josias Ruffhead, purchased from Justice Crompton of Elstow an orchard in Mill Lane, in which there was a barn. This barn was at once duly licensed as their place of meeting, as the following document shows :

A place for a Teacher in Bedford.	CHARLES, &c. To all Mayors, Bailiffs, Constables, and others, Our Officers and Ministers, Civill and Military, whom it may concerne, Greeting. In pursuance of our Declaracon of the 15th of March, 167 $\frac{1}{2}$, Wee have allowed and Wee doe hereby allow of the House of Josias Roughed in Bedford to be a place for the use of such as doe not conforme to the Church of England who are of the Perswasion com- monly called Congregationall to meet and assemble in, in order to their Publick Worship and devotion. And all and Singular Our Officers and Ministers,
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Ecclesiasticall, Civill, and Military, whom it may concerne are to take due notice hereof. And they and every of them are hereby strictly charged and required to hinder any Tumult or Disturbance, and to protect them in their said Meetings and Assemblies. Given at our Court at Whitehall the 9th day of May in the 24th yeare of our Reigne, 1672.

By His Ma^{tie's} command,

ARLINGTON.

The barn thus licensed with the orchard in which it stood were, on payment of a sum of £50, duly conveyed by indenture dated August 20, 1672, from "Josias Ruffhead to John Bunyan, of the Towne of Bedford, Brasier, and others." The orchard "with all the Edifice or Barne upon it" thus sold to Bunyan and his friends, was situate on a strip of land between Castle Lane and Mill Lane or School Lane on the south and north, and between a garden held by John Eston, on the east side (with a barn upon it) called Pynners, and a garden with a dove-house upon it on the west side, still held by Josias Ruffhead, and separated by a paling.

The spot thus chosen for Bunyan on his release from prison has been the home of the church ever since, and for the remaining sixteen years of his life was the centre of his activity, the circumference of his influence reaching to the borders of the adjacent counties and even to London itself. He quickly became the organising bishop of the whole district. When he applied for his own licence to preach, in May 1672, and for Josias Ruffhead's barn, he applied

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also for licences for twenty-five other preachers and for thirty other buildings.

In the autumn of the same year in which he was released we find him preaching at Leicester on October 6, which was Sunday. The fact is chronicled in the "Town Records," because it was necessary for the preacher to show his licence "to Mr. Overinge the Mayor, Mr. Freeman and Mr. Browne being present." The old house in which, according to tradition, he preached on that occasion, still stands nearly opposite St. Nicholas' Church, and is the one in which, in the course of the following century, that other great itinerant preacher, John Wesley, slept for a night when on a Gospel errand to the town. About the time Bunyan was showing his licence to Mr. Mayor at Leicester, there came out a reply to the book he had published in the spring on the "Doctrine of Justification by Faith," in which he had dealt rather closely and in some respects not altogether fairly with the work on the "Design of Christianity," by Edward Fowler, rector of Northill. This reply was licensed on September 10, 1672, and had the sort of title which so often graced the pamphlets and heralded the controversies of those days.* It professed to be written by a friend on Fowler's behalf. Fowler himself, however, is credited with the performance, the truth probably being that it

* "Dirt Wip't Off: or a manifest Discovery of the Gross Ignorance, Erroneousness, and most Unchristian and Wicked Spirit of one John Bunyan, Lay-Preacher in Bedford." London: Richard Royston, Bookseller to His most Sacred Majesty, 1672.

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was the joint work of himself and his curate. The book has some good qualities, but meekness and gentleness are not its most conspicuous features. A country rector is accustomed to a good deal of deference from his rural neighbours, and when a book of his has been rudely assailed by a tinker, he naturally feels somewhat impatient. "Among the many successors of the Pharisees in these days, there are none," the writer has "reason to believe, whose breasts are fuller of rancour and malice than is the breast of the man that hath occasioned the publication of this pamphlet, viz., John Bunyan, a person that hath been near these twenty years, or longer, most infamous in the Town and County of Bedford for a very Pestilent Schismatick." This no doubt was the estimate of Bunyan held in the average country rectories and vicarages of Bedfordshire, and it was scarcely likely that Fowler, whose self-complacency had been ruffled by the tinker's criticisms, would take a broader view of the man than his brethren did.

Bunyan appears to have made no rejoinder to this attack, for he was by this time engaged in warfare that concerned him more nearly. The book he had published in the early months of 1672, in which he had contended for the reception of saints into church fellowship as saints, independently of water baptism, had been violently assailed by Paul, D'Anvers, and William Kiffin the leader of those London Baptists who held to the principle of strict communion. As Bunyan's attitude on the question of baptism is still of present interest to many, both

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in this country and in America, it may be well to define it as accurately as we can.

The Church at Bedford, of which he was now the pastor, had from the beginning taken up on this question a position of neutrality. All its earliest members had been brought up in the National Church, and in their infancy baptized into its communion. Most of them, too, before coming together in a separate church, had had their own children baptized at the hands of the clergy. The registers of St. Paul's, in Bedford, mention the baptism of the children of John Eston, John Grew, Anthony Harrington, and of others afterwards in fellowship with them. John Gifford is usually spoken of as a Baptist. As a matter of fact, there is not a single line of evidence one way or the other to show what his personal convictions upon the subject were. He appealed to the brethren from his deathbed not to divide the Church on such questions. "Concerning separation from the Church about baptism," says he, "laying on of hands, anointing with oil, psalms or any externals, I charge every one of you respectively, as you will give an account for it to our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge both quick and dead at his coming, that none of you be found guilty of this great evil, which, while some have committed—and that through a zeal for God, yet not according to knowledge—they have erred from the law of the love of Christ, and have made a rent from the true Church, which is but one." The fact is that baptism was but one of several externals on which there was at that time considerable ferment of opinion. Their

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neighbour, William Dell, who, as we have seen, had great influence with the brethren at Bedford, rector of a parish and head of a college though he was, was in favour of dispensing with baptism altogether. Indeed so pronounced were his opinions in this direction that he has sometimes been classed as a Quaker, and his books published as Quaker books. He held that there were two baptisms, that of John and that of Christ, the one of water, the other of the Spirit. The baptism of John was the baptism of bodies, the baptism of Christ the baptism of souls. John's water-baptism was to last but till Christ's fire-baptism began, and then the fire should lick up the water, the water-baptism decreasing as the Spirit-baptism increased. Christ was baptized of John, just as he was circumcised as a child, to fulfil all righteousness, that is, to meet the last of the requirements of a system under which he was born, but which was vanishing away. Christ, he said, never baptized, neither did Paul care to do so, though he preached the word in a circuit from Jerusalem to Illyricum. And though some of the other Apostles used baptism, they only did so for a time as they used circumcision, for their sakes who were weak. Ceremonies are not easily and suddenly laid down, and it was best to leave circumcision without hands, to put an end by degrees to that made with hands. For ceremonies are best laid down and old customs best laid aside by the efficacy of the Spirit and the power of righteousness.

Such were the advanced opinions of William Dell, which, sustained as they were by his strenuous

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advocacy, were possibly not without influence among his Bedford neighbours. Be that as it may, they had resolved from the first that character rather than ritual should be the foundation of fellowship, and that on external matters every brother should be left to walk as he believed himself to be led by the Spirit of God. So strongly did they feel on this point that, somewhat inconsistently as it seems to me, they refused to recognise as churches of Christ those communities which held to the strict communion principle. They even refused to transfer their honoured sister, Mrs. Tilney, to a church in London of which her own son-in-law was the pastor, because that Church made baptism by immersion an indispensable condition of membership. In yet another case a similar refusal was given and persisted in. In their own records there is no mention whatever of the baptism of any of their members. Beyond the two cases of refusal just referred to, the mere word "baptism" only occurs twice between 1650 and 1690. This was in 1656, and the passages are these: "Our sister Linford having upon the account of Baptisme (as shee pretended) wthdrawne from the congregation, was required to be at the meeting to render a reason for her so doing." The following month it is mentioned that Brother Crompe, who had been previously proposed for fellowship, "desires to stay still upon the account of Baptisme." These are literally the only references to the subject in the "Act-Book" of the Church from its foundation to the time of Bunyan's death, and they are, as will be seen, extremely slight, while the scruples of the

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brother and sister concerned may be interpreted either one way or the other.

It is natural to suppose that Bunyan would be considerably influenced by the feeling of his brethren on this matter. In his work entitled "Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism no bar to Communion," he rather implies than plainly states that he is a Baptist. He defends "the godly in the land who are not of *our* persuasion;" he pleads "not for a despising of baptism, but a bearing with our brother that cannot do it for want of light." He asks, "Because I will not suffer water to carry away Epistles from the Christians, and because I will not let Water Baptism be the rule, the door, the bolt, the bar, the wall of division between the righteous and the righteous, must I therefore be judged to be a man without conscience of the worship of Jesus Christ? The Lord deliver me from superstitions and idolatrous thoughts about any of the ordinances of Christ and of God." He appears to have had three of his children baptized at church in their infancy, as we gather from the register of the parishes of Elstow and St. Cuthbert's. The following are the extracts in question :

Elstow : "Mary, the daughter of John Bonion, baptized July 20, 1650."

"Elizabeth, the daughter of John Bonyon, was born 14th day of April, 1654."

St. Cuthbert's, Bedford, 1672 : "Baptized Joseph Bunyan, y^e son of John Bunyan, Nov. 16."

There is no difficulty in respect to the first case, that

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of his blind daughter Mary, inasmuch as her baptism at Elstow Church took place three years before he united himself with the brethren at Bedford. The case is not so clear with respect to Elizabeth, who was baptized at the same place in 1654; for John Bunyan joined John Gifford's church in 1653, and if on his admission he was baptized by immersion, it is difficult to account for the baptism of his infant daughter the following year by sprinkling. It will be pointed out, perhaps, that the register notes that Elizabeth Bunyan was *born* on April 14, and says nothing about her baptism. But it must be remembered that the previous year an Act of Parliament had been passed requiring the date of birth to be inserted in the register instead of that of baptism. There is a curious entry in the parish register of Maid's Moreton, county Bucks, which removes all doubt on the point:

"A.D. 1653. Now came in force a goodly Act made by the Usurper Cromwell's little Parliament, who ordered not the baptism but the birth of children to be recorded in the parish Register. And though the baptism of some be not expressed here, yet these are to certify all whom it may concern, and that on the word of a priest, that there is no person hereafter mentioned by the then registers of the parish but was duly and orderly baptized." *

To show further that this Act of 1653 sufficiently accounts for the form of entry in 1654, it may be

* "Parish Registers in England." By R. E. Chester Waters, 1883, p. 12.

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mentioned that in the Transcript Register from Elstow parish that year the name of Elizabeth Bunyan occurs in a list of twenty-three children, all returned under the head of "Christenings," and that the word "borne," and not "baptized," is used in every case. There can be little doubt, therefore, that the year after John Bunyan joined the Bedford brotherhood his second daughter, like his first, was baptized at Elstow Church. The third case, that of his son Joseph, is the most remarkable of all, for this child according to the register was baptized at St. Cuthbert's Church after Bunyan's twelve years' imprisonment for conscience' sake, and during the time he was conducting the controversy on open communion with D'Anvers and Paul. The fact is curious, and can only be accounted for on the supposition that upon the question of baptism he had no very strong feeling any way. In his reply at this time to D'Anvers and Paul he says :

"You ask me next, How long is it since I was a Baptist? I must tell you I know none to whom that title is so proper as to the disciples of John. And since you would know by what name I would be distinguished from others, I tell you I would be, and hope I am, a CHRISTIAN, and choose, if God should count me worthy, to be called a Christian, a believer, or other such name which is approved by the Holy Ghost. And as for those titles of Anabaptists, Independents, Presbyterians, or the like, I conclude that they came neither from Jerusalem, nor Antioch, but rather from hell and Babylon, for they naturally tend to divisions. You may know them by their fruits."

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His "Confession of my Faith and Reason of my Practice"* touched upon baptism and the terms of communion, but only in a subordinate way. It was written in the early part of 1672, at the end of his imprisonment, and its main purpose was to vindicate his teaching, and, if possible, to secure his liberty. In his address to the reader, at the outset he says:

"I marvel not that both you and others do think my long imprisonment strange (or, rather, strangely of me for the sake of that), for verily I should also have done it myself had not the Holy Ghost long since forbidden me. . . . I have not hitherto been so sordid as to stand to a doctrine right or wrong, much less when so weighty an argument as above eleven years' imprisonment is continually dogging of me to weigh and pause, and pause again, the grounds and foundation of those principles, for which I thus have suffered; but having not only at my trial asserted them, but also since, even all this tedious tract of time, in cool blood, a thousand times, by the word of God, examined them and found them good, I cannot, I dare not now revolt or deny the same on pain of eternal damnation."

Faith and holiness are, he says, his professed principles, and his endeavour is to be at peace with all men. Here are his teachings, let his enemies judge for themselves whether there is anything that savours of heresy or rebellion, anything that renders him worthy of almost twelve years' imprisonment, or deserving to be hanged or banished for ever according

* "A Confession of my Faith, and a Reason of my Practice" [1672]. No copy of the first edition known

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to their tremendous sentence. He cannot hold communion with the ungodly and openly profane, and he cannot consent that his soul should be governed in any of his approaches to God by the superstitious inventions of this world. With this exception, for which he does not think he ought to be rebuked spite of slander and falsehood, he shall always show himself a peaceable and obedient subject. "But," he adds finely, "if nothing will do unless I make of my conscience a continual butchery and slaughter-shop, unless putting out my own eyes, I commit me to the blind to lead me, as I doubt not is desired by some, I have determined, the Almighty God being my help and shield, yet to suffer, if frail life might continue so long, even till the moss shall grow on mine eyebrows, rather than thus to violate my faith and principles."

In this Confession of his he sets forth his belief in the main doctrines of Scripture, and it is only towards the end that he touches upon the question of baptism, and the terms of communion. It was this latter part which led to the controversy with D'Anvers, and to the appearance in 1673 of Bunyan's reply, entitled "Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism no bar to Communion,"* and of his rejoinder in 1674, under the title, "Peaceable Principles and True."†

* "Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism no Bar to Communion : or to Communicate with Saints, as Saints, proved Lawful." By John Bunyan. London: Printed for John Wilkins, and are to be sold at his Shop in Exchange Alley, next door to the Exchange Coffee House, over against the Royal Exchange, 1673.

† "Peaceable Principles and True : or a Brief Answer to

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He had no great liking for controversy, least of all on the subject of Baptism. He would not, he says, have set pen to paper upon the question but for those continual assaults which for the last eighteen years the brethren of the rigid way had made not only upon the congregation at Bedford to rend it, but also upon many others about them. He thinks it childish and carnal to divide a church upon such mere matters of ritual. "You must know I am still of that mind and shall be so long as I see the effects that follow, viz., the breach of love, taking off Christians from the more weighty things of God, and to make them quarrel and have heartburnings one against another." With such words as these he left this dispute and these disputants, never, so far as we know, to return to them again.

It was soon after this war with D'Anvers and Paul that there came into Bunyan's life the painful episode narrated in the experience of Agnes Beaumont, and related by herself.* She gives no dates in her story, but the mention of the death of her father enables us by the help of the Edworth register to fix the time as the month of February 1674. The story is as follows: In those days, and in a farmhouse still

Mr. D'Anvers and Mr. Paul's Books against my Confession of Faith, and Differences in Judgment about Baptism no Bar to Communion. Wherein their Scriptureless notions are overthrown, and my Peaceable Principles still maintained." No copy of first edition known.

* Addl. MSS. 2414. Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont. This MS., in the British Museum, if not in the actual handwriting of Agnes, is evidently a contemporary document.

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pointed out, there lived at Edworth, a village on the Bedfordshire border towards Hertfordshire, a farmer named John Beamont or Beaumont. He was widowed, and his unmarried daughter Agnes, then in her twenty-first year, kept his house, a married son and a married daughter living at adjacent farms in the parish. The whole family had at one time felt the influence of the Nonconformist preachers. Some of them, indeed, had been sufferers for conscience' sake, as we gather from William Foster's "Act-Book," where it is recorded that John Beaumont the son, with his wife Elizabeth, were presented by the churchwardens of Edworth at the Court of the Archdeaconry held at Bedford in the spring of 1669, for refusing to come to the sacrament at the parish church the previous Easter, and were fined accordingly. John Beaumont, the father, had himself been more than once deeply moved under Bunyan's own preaching. "Some time before," says Agnes, "my father had heard him preach God's word, and heard him with a broken heart, as he had several others, and afterwards would cry to the Lord in secret as well as I." But by-and-by some Edworth neighbour, who had great ascendancy over him, contrived to turn his mind against the meetings and the preachers, and especially against Bunyan himself. His daughter Agnes had, however, joined the Bedford Church at Gamlingay in December 1672, the account of her admission being the first entry made in the church book in Bunyan's handwriting after he became pastor, he himself also inscribing her name in the church roll, spelling it thus—Agniss Behemont. In February

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1674 she was anxious to be present at a meeting of the church to be held at Gamlingay. With much reluctance her father gave his consent, she going over in the morning to her brother's house, to join him and others on the journey. Here an unexpected difficulty arose ; John Wilson, with whom it had been arranged she should ride to Gamlingay, for some reason failed to come ; the February roads were impassable on foot, and the only horse that could be spared from the work of the farm was to carry her brother and his wife, pillion-wise, to the meeting. In the midst of this perplexity Bunyan himself unexpectedly rode up on his way thither also, and was asked to take up Agnes behind him. Knowing the elder Beaumont's feeling he hesitated. "Your father will be grievous angry," said he, "if I should." Overcome at length, however, by her entreaties he started, taking her with him. From a distant field the old man saw them together, a sight at which his anger knew no bounds. He was too far away to prevent their going ; but on her return Agnes found the door of her home relentlessly bolted against her, her father from within refusing to open till she would promise to break with these people and all their ways. That cold February night, wrapped in her riding-dress, she spent in the barn. Next morning, her father being still inexorable, she crossed the fields to her brother's house, remaining there till the following Sunday when, after much exercise of mind and in deep anguish of spirit, she yielded to her father's will, and returned to her home. She had only been back two days, when on the Tuesday, as they were alone in

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the house together, her father was strangely, fatally seized, and suddenly died.

That same day, as she was bending over the dying man, a clergyman named Lane was busy sending forth a scandalous story at Baldock Market concerning Bunyan and herself. This man, though preaching at Edworth, lived at Bedford, and therefore knew them both, and had recognised them riding together "at Gamlingay town-end." His story, and that of John Beaumont's strange and unexpected death, now went forth together. It was known that there had been bitter difference between father and daughter, followed by tardy and quite recent reconciliation; there needed but one stroke of malignant ingenuity to complete the whole. This was furnished by a neighbouring lawyer named Farrow, who, writhing under the recent rejection of his suit by Agnes, gave forth that she had poisoned her father, and that Bunyan had furnished her with the means of doing it. The whole parish was in commotion, the funeral deferred, and the coroner called. For those most deeply concerned it was a time of painful anxiety. "I did not know," writes Agnes, "how far God might suffer this man and the devil to go. It also troubled me to think that in case I suffered, another as innocent as myself might suffer too," referring, of course, to Bunyan and his implication in the charge; "but the Lord knew our innocency in this affair, both in thought, and word, and deed."

Under official investigation the cruel charge came to nothing. Comparatively rude as was the medical

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science of those days, it was sufficient to show that though John Beaumont's death was painfully sudden, it was yet simply natural. The innocent, therefore, were acquitted, and their accusers covered with shame. Agnes outlived this anxious time by nearly fifty years, dying at Highgate in 1720. In compliance with her own request she was brought to be buried in the graveyard of the Tilehouse Street Chapel at Hitchin, where an inscription keeps up her memory and the remembrance of her story.

It was probably after this painful incident that Bunyan added to his "Grace Abounding" that passage of vindication not found in the first edition of 1666, but which does occur in the next edition we happen to have, the eighth, which appeared in 1688—probably also in editions intervening—in which he says :

"It was reported with the boldest confidence that I had my Misses, my Whores, my Bastards, yea, two Wives at once, and the like. My foes have missed their mark in their shooting at me. I am not the man. I wish that they themselves be guiltless. If all the Fornicators and Adulterers in England were hanged by the neck till they be dead, John Bunyan, the object of their envy, would still be alive and well. I bind these lies and slander to me as an ornament ; it belongs to my Christian profession to be vilified, slandered, reproached, and reviled : and since all this is nothing else, as my God and my conscience do bear me witness, I rejoice in reproaches for Christ's sake."

In the year 1675, after publishing his "Peaceable

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Principles and True," he sent forth another work also, entitled, "Light for them that sit in Darkness." It is a discourse upon the doctrine of the person, deeds, and sufferings of Christ, it is therefore a discourse into which he put his whole heart. "Reader," says he, "hear me patiently. I have presented thee with that which I have received from God. I know it to be the way of salvation. I have ventured my own soul thereon with gladness; and if all the souls in the world were mine as mine own soul is, I would, through God's grace, venture every one of them there. I have not writ at a venture, nor borrowed my doctrine from libraries. I depend upon the sayings of no man. I found it in the scriptures of truth, among the true sayings of God." The book is the expansion of a sermon preached from the text—"Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Saviour Jesus." It dwells upon the promise which lighted up pre-Christian times, and upon the way the promise was fulfilled in Christ when the hour was ripe.

While thus earnestly plying his pen as a writer Bunyan was also earnestly making use of his newly acquired liberty as pastor and preacher. Indeed he seems to have been too busy to keep any records of his busy life. The minutes of the church's proceedings during the time he was pastor are comparatively scanty.

From the minutes which are given, and still more from the mere entries of the reception of members, which have been omitted, it would appear that the church under Bunyan's care was a widespread com-

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munity of believers, drawing some of its members from Ashwell in Herts, and Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire, as well as from far outlying villages in Bedfordshire on all sides. The oversight of this brotherhood involved much going to and fro on the part of the pastor who preached in towns and villages by the way far and near. Bishop Bunyan, as partly in jest and partly in earnest he came to be called, had a large diocese, and one could have wished that he had kept such a journal of his experiences as his great contemporary, George Fox, kept in that century, or John Wesley in the next, giving vivid pictures of the men he met, of the scenes in which he took part, and of the times that passed over him. Traditions of the man linger in places about which he himself is silent, as silent he was about most things in his outward life. It is said, for example, that the Congregational Church at John Street, Royston, was founded by William Bedford, a Cambridge student, who was converted to God through stopping to hear John Bunyan preach at Melbourn near by.* At Coleman Green, too, a small hamlet in the parish of Sandridge, near St. Albans, some cottages are pointed out where he is said to have preached, possibly during some of the journeys he made to London. On the old ivy-covered chimney there has been fixed this inscription, "John Bunyan is said by tradition to have preached, and occasionally to have lodged in the cottage of which this chimney was a part."† In those days of persecution there was a congregation

* Urwick's "Nonconformity in Herts," p. 814.

† *Ibid.* p. 215.

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of Nonconformists at Kensworth, in Hertfordshire, which was central to a wide district extending southward to Hemel Hempstead and St. Albans, northward to Luton, Tilsworth, Houghton Regis, and Dunstable, and eastward to Hitchin and Baldock. In 1675 this church numbered as many as three hundred and eighty members, nineteen of whom were resident in Luton. It was about this date that these Luton brethren separated from the Kensworth Church and formed themselves into an independent community, worshipping secretly in an apartment in the roof of the old house of the Dallow Farm, the trap-door of the apartment being still to be seen. In that secret chamber tradition reports that Bunyan often preached to these early Nonconformists in days when the vigilance of spies necessitated his coming and going in disguise, or under cover of the darkness of night. Eastward, too, in the direction of Hitchin, the tradition of his visits is even stronger still. About three miles from the town stood in those days the country house known as Hunsdon House, and afterwards as Preston Castle, which with its pleasant gardens and shrubberies has long since disappeared. It may be mentioned by the way that some thirty years after Bunyan's time, it was in the possession of a certain Captain Hinde, who was a quaint compound of the old soldier and the country gentleman, and who is generally recognised as the original of the character of Uncle Toby in "Tristram Shandy." This worthy seems to have amused his neighbours, and kept up his own military memories by surrounding his house with fortifications, giving it an embattled

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front, and summoning his labourers from the harvest-field by bugle call.

Within a few hundred yards of the gateway to Preston Castle, and in the midst of a thick wood which bordered the Castle meadows, and is known as Wainwood, there was a green space, forming a sort of natural amphitheatre, which has come to be called Bunyan's Dell. It is capable of holding several hundred people, and here while the loneliness of the wood sheltered them from their enemies, and friendly scouts kept watch on every side, Bunyan often preached to the people the word of life. There were those living near who were in earnest sympathy with him. We find from the records that the house of Widow Heath, in Preston, Hertfordshire, was licensed for a Congregational meeting-place on May 2, 1672, and that a licence was granted to Thomas Milway to be congregational teacher there. At Hunsdon House also there were then living six brothers of the name of Foster, staunch and true men, whose descendants likewise have many of them both in that county and in the three counties adjacent, borne honoured names in the annals of Nonconformity. These six brothers were among those who for conscience' sake risked the spoiling of goods and the loss of liberty. In the stormy times passing over them, their house was the asylum of the persecuted, and among the friends from a distance there was no guest more frequent or more welcome at their fireside than Bunyan himself. These dwellers in Preston formed the nucleus of the greater gatherings in Wainwood Dell, to which when Bunyan happened to be the preacher the people

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came from all the country round. The tradition of those secret assemblies, where because they met at their peril, earnest men sent up their prayers with strong crying and tears and listened to the truth of God as those who hungered for bread, has come down unbroken to our own times. There is a soul of good in things evil, and the memories of those anxious days have appealed to the imagination and sympathy of every generation since ; have deepened the love of liberty, and made more precious to thousands the truth their fathers loved so well, and for which they suffered so much.

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